1

Informes sobre
Hundimientos de
Naves Británicas

CAJA 88

1

ARMADA

Aviación Naval

Historia de la Aviación

Un libro de H. Martini

Se acaba de publicar el tercer tomo de Historia de la Aviación Naval Argentina. Editado por el Departamento de Estudios históricos Navales, del Estado Mayor General de la Armada, y con la rigurosa mirada del contraalmirante Héctor A. Martini, ofrece en sus páginas un extenso detalle y una información bien documentada sobre la acción protagónica de esta fuerza en la Guerra del Atlántico Sur. A doce años del enfrentamiento bélico, el autor expone la gesta heroica de los que surcaron a vuelo rasante nuestros mares. Tampoco faltan los nombres de aquellos aviadores y héroes desaparecidos en la lucha, que continúan vivos en la memoria de sus camaradas. El tomo consta de 68 capítulos, subdivididos en títulos: Operación Rosario; Operaciones; Búsqueda y rescate; Bases y estaciones aeronavales; Talleres y Artesanales; y finalmente las conclusiones. Cada uno de ellos refleja una mirada distinta sobre el mismo tema, manteniendo como eje una prosa donde no abundan adjetivos calificativos y en la cual los hechos son contados sin frases remanidas, respetando la veracidad de lo sucedido. La seriedad documental se hace presente en cada capítulo. También abundan gráficos, cartografía y estadísticas que respaldan a una obra dedicada a la memoria de la aviación naval, fuerza que dio su vida por la Patria en el conflicto del Atlántico Sur. ◆

1990

ESTADO MAYOR GENERAL DE LA ARMADA
SECRETARIA GENERAL NAVAL
DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDIOS HISTORICOS NAVALES

HISTORIA NAVAL ARGENTINA 1

Historia de la Aviación Naval Argentina

(Conflicto del Atlántico Sur)

Compilada por el
Contraalmirante (R.S.)
D. Héctor A. MARTINI

TOMO III

Buenos Aires, 1992.

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PROPIEDAD

CAPITULO 40

TERCERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE

1. RELACION DE LA PLANA MAYOR Y DOTACION

Como se ha relatado en la OPERACION ROSARIO, la Escuadrilla embarcó 3 A-4Q en el Portaaviones A.R.A. "25 DE MAYO". Por no ser requeridos, no participaron activamente en esa ocasión, pero el desarrollo de los acontecimientos la llevó a hacerlo en forma intensiva, logrando éxitos y pagando su precio en pilotos y material.

Los 3 aviones y el personal desembarcaron el 6 de abril, regresando a COMANDANTE ESPORA para acelerar su alistamiento a fin de alcanzar el mayor nivel en el menor tiempo posible. Constituyó la UNIDAD DE TAREAS 80.3.2.(UT 80.3.2).

COMANDANTE DE LA TERCERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE Y UT 80.3.2

CC RODOLFO CASTRO FOX

PLANA MAYOR

CC Alberto I. PHILIPPI (Adscripto)
CC Carlos M. ZUBIZARRETA
TN Benito I. ROTOLO (Adscripto)
TN Carlos S. OLIVEIRA (Adscripto)
TN Marco A. BENITEZ
TN Roberto G. SYLVESTER
TN José C. ARCA (Adscripto)
TN Carlos A. LECOUR
TN Alejandro G. OLMEDO
TN Marcelo G. MARQUEZ
TC Héctor R. VITE
TC Félix MEDICI

DOTACION

SM Avelino MOSQUEIRA	CS José LAMEIRO
SP Abel MIÑOZ	CS Miguel NICOLETTI
SI Gerardo RAMIREZ	CS Mario PANIAGUA
SI Héctor RAMOS	CS Miguel REARTE
SI Jesús PEREZ	CS Rubén LIMIA
SS Juan SANTILLAN	CS Daniel PEDRAZOLI
SS Atilio GUTIERREZ	CS Guillermo NADOR
SS Héctor COLETTI	CS Hugo INNAMORATO
SS Sebastián BENITEZ	CS Néstor BENITEZ
SS Oscar ZIGNAGO	CS Miguel GIAMPIETRI
SS Orlando VELAZQUEZ	CS Néstor GOMEZ
SS Santos QUIROGA	CS Jorge MONTERO
SS Daniel RODRIGUEZ	CS Héctor MAIDANA
SS César GONZALEZ	CS Raúl MOYANO
SS G. DE LA CEREZA	CS Walter OSE
SS Ramón FARIAS	CS Luis PEREZ
SS Enrique VALLEJOS	CS Héctor PEREZ
SS Héctor PEREZ	CS Juan PIANUCCI
SS Carlos GUARDIA	CS Daniel RIEDINGER
SS César DIAZ	CS Juan SOTO
CP Emiliano VILLAR	CS Rubén YAÑEZ
CP Héctor BELTRAN	CS Edgardo WUSIKOSKY
CP Angel MONTES	CS Javier RAMIREZ
CP Osvaldo MALLIMACI	CS Ramón FERREYRA
CP Sergio BOWYER	CS Pío DURE
CP Manuel LENCINA	CS Hugo MORENO
CP Eduardo DIOVICE	CS Hugo SILVA
CP José PAEZ	CS Carlos SOSA
CI Juan GUTIERREZ	CC62 Fabio CAMACHO
CI Gregorio LOPEZ	CC62 Juan CASTILLO
CI Norberto GONZALEZ	CC62 Ramón GONZA
CI Eusebio PAEZ	CC62 Rafael CASTELLI
CI Eduardo HIDALGO	CC62 Juan VERA
CI Héctor CHAVEZ	CC62 Héctor TOLEDO
CI Elio DE LA FUENTE	CC62 Juan VILLEGAS
CI Carlos GONZALEZ	CC62 Héctor ZAZUA
CI Mario QUINTEROS	CC62 Francisco COLQUI
CS Rafael CONDORI	CC62 Welindo RIOS
CS Gustavo BORRONI	CC62 Alejandro CONDORI

2. UNIDADES AEREAS

8 A-4Q "SKYHAWK"	3-A-301
	3-A-302
	3-A-304
	3-A-305
	3-A-306
	3-A-307
	3-A-312
	3-A-314

3. MISION DE LA UNIDAD

- Destruir/neutralizar.
- Atacar Unidades Navales enemigas en aguas restringidas.
- Efectuar reconocimiento armado antisuperficie.
- Ataque o Interdicción a Unidades Terrestres enemigas.

4. DESARROLLO DE LAS OPERACIONES

Entre el 6 de abril y el 17 de abril se cumplieron las siguientes tareas:

Se incorporaron cinco pilotos calificados en A4Q que se encontraban destinados fuera de la unidad.

Se alistaron cinco aviones más totalizando el máximo posible, ocho unidades.

La Escuadrilla se adiestró para ejecutar operaciones de ataque a Unidades de Superficie, apoyo aéreo directo y defensa contraérea, todo en condiciones diurnas.

Se adiestraron en operaciones de reaprovisionamiento en vuelo con el KC-130 las que efectuó con los SUE el 10 y el 17 de abril.

En el polígono de ISLA VERDE, se intensificaron las ejercitaciones de armas para lanzamiento rasante de bombas retardadas en reguero.

Se adiestraron todos los pilotos en práctica en tierra de aterrizaje en portaaviones (PTAP) y en maniobras de combate aéreo.

El 18 de abril la Escuadrilla embarcó en el portaaviones con ocho aviones y once pilotos.

Durante la navegación se recalificaron todos los pilotos, incluyendo los recientemente incorporados.

Se realizaron ejercitaciones de ataque a unidades de superficie tipo 42 (A.R.A. "HERCULES" y "SANTISIMA TRINIDAD") y en guiado de aviones con S2E.

Para ejercicios conjuntos de ataque y defensa de unidades de superficie se efectuaron interceptaciones a "aviones atacantes" pertenecientes a la FUERZA AEREA, que operaban desde aeródromos en tierra.

La Escuadrilla desembarcó el 26 de abril, instalándose equipos de navegación VLF OMEGA en dos aviones y receptores de sonoboya en otros dos, a fin de mejorar la navegación y recalada sobre el avión guiador.

La unidad volvió a embarcar el 28 de abril en el portaaviones, que se incorporó a la FT 79.

Embarcaron doce pilotos: CC PHILIPPI, CC CASTRO FOX, CC ZUBIZARRETA, TN ROTOLO, TN OLIVEIRA, TN BENITEZ, TN SYLVESTER, TN ARCA, TN LECOUR, TF OLMEDO, TF MARQUEZ, TC MEDICI y los ocho aviones.

Durante la navegación se cubrió guardia de interceptor listo en cubierta (ILC), con dos aviones a 5 minutos del catapultaje, de ataque antisuperficie con cuatro aviones en configuración bombas (6 MK 82) y un avión lanzador de CHAFF a 30 minutos de alerta.

El octavo avión estaba en configuración de tanque para reaprovisionamiento en vuelo.

El 1 de mayo a 1513 hs. el 2-AS-23 (CC DABINI) obtuvo contacto con siete blancos estimados como la Fuerza de Tarea inglesa en latitud 49°34'(S) longitud 57°10'(W). A 2300 hs. mantiene el contacto en latitud 50°00'(S) longitud 56°25'(W) localizando un blanco grande y tres medianos.

A 1530, ante contactos desconocidos en el radar aire, se lanzó la sección ILC de guardia (CC PHILIPPI y TC MEDICI F.) interceptando aviones Canberra de la FUERZA AEREA que regresaban a la BASE AERONAVAL ALMIRANTE ZAR en TRELEW luego de operar en la zona de MALVINAS. Uno de estos aviones había sido derribado al norte de las islas, destacándose el Aviso A.R.A. "ALFEREZ SOBRAL" para el rescate de los dos tripulantes. El

buque fue atacado con misiles lanzados por helicópteros falleciendo su comandante y siete hombres de la tripulación.

Por operar sin aeródromo de alternativa se mantuvo el avión tanquero en vuelo, listo a realizar reabastecimiento en el aire.

Ante las localizaciones de los S2E a 1513 y 2300 del 1° de mayo, el Comandante de la FLOTA DE MAR ordenó planificar un ataque en las primeras horas del 2 de mayo.

Se alistaron seis A-4-Q configurados con 4 bombas MK-82 de 250 kg c/u: 3-A-301 (CC CASTRO FOX), 3-A-314 (TF MARQUEZ), 3-A-302 (TN BENITEZ), 3-A-306 (TN OLIVEIRA), 3-A-312 (TN LECOUR) y 3-A-305 (TN SYLVESTER).

El plan era atacar con 6 aviones, manteniendo uno de reserva y el último como avión-tanquero, para reaprovisionar a los demás.

Con 12 pilotos, la Escuadrilla organizó dos grupos de 6 para cubrir la guardia en caso de ordenarse un ataque; estos eran los pilotos de guardia.

Según las tablas de probabilidades, y considerando la defensa antiaérea y contraaérea británica, de los 6 aviones que despegaban (24 bombas) solamente 4 llegaban a poder lanzar (16 bombas) y regresarían al portaaviones 2 aviones.

De las 16 bombas lanzadas, había una probabilidad de impacto del 25% (4 bombas de 250 kg).

Este daño podía llegar a neutralizar a un portaaviones, justificando la pérdida de 4 aviones.

Durante la noche comenzó a calmar el viento, caso poco usual en el Atlántico Sur. Este hecho, sumado a la distancia a la cual se debía efectuar el ataque, motivó que se debieran aligerar los aviones de bombas, ya que no se podía hacerlo con el combustible, a fin de estar en peso de catapultaje.

Próximo a la hora del catapultaje, el viento era nulo, por lo que los aviones debían salir con una sola bomba cada uno, lo que hacía que las probabilidades de impacto y de daños fueran mínimos.(1 bomba de las 4).

Se corría un gran riesgo de pérdida de aviones propios, con una escasa probabilidad de éxito, por lo que se canceló la operación.

Esos 8 A4Q era todo lo que tenía la ARMADA en ese tipo y la guerra recién empezaba. Las acciones del Estrecho de San Carlos demostraron el rendimiento de la Escuadrilla.

Distintas podrían haber sido las cosas si se hubieran catapultado con 4 bombas por avión.

Este era el sentimiento de los pilotos durante ese día y esa noche, relatado por ellos mismos.

"El día 1° de mayo los GT 79.1 y 79.2 estábamos situados en un área al Este de PUERTO DESEADO, unas 120 millas mar adentro, fuera de la zona de exclusión de 200 millas impuesta por los ingleses".

"Desde la mañana temprano mantuvimos una guardia de interceptores listos en cubierta (I L C) consistente en dos A4Q equipados con cañones y dos misiles SILDEWINDER AIM-9 B cada uno, a cinco minutos de aviso para el despegue".

"Ello implicaba que el avión del líder debería estar en catapulta con la prueba de motor y equipos realizada, en enlace radial con la torre de control (TOCO) y la Central de Informaciones de Combate (CIC) por donde el piloto recibía periódicamente actualización de la información relacionada con el despegue y los blancos".

"En dos oportunidades sonó la alarma de ataque aéreo ante la aparición de blancos aéreos no identificados y se ordenó el despegue de la PAC, pero los "incursores" resultaron ser aviones de la FUERZA AEREA, que en su vuelo desde Comodoro Rivadavia o Río Deseado hacia las islas para repeler el ataque inglés que se llevaba a cabo en esos momentos, pasaban en las proximidades de la FUERZA NAVAL ARGENTINA".

"A mediodía fue catapultado un Tracker (2-AS-23-CC DABINI) para búsqueda de superficie, quien informó contacto con la fuerza inglesa a 1513 hs., (Pos. Latitud 49°34' S, Longitud 57°10' W)".

"A 1555 hs., la FT79 recibió el siguiente mensaje del CTOAS: "Enemigo atacando, queda en libertad de acción".

"La FT79 puso rumbo hacia una posición relativa favorable para lanzar su ataque, navegando a 18/20 nudos en formación con cortinado circular antisubmarino - antisuperficie donde el "25 DE MAYO" era el núcleo".

"Posteriormente el Almirante ALLARA modificó esta disposición y dispuso que las tres Corbetas Tipo 69 "GUERRICO", "DRUMMOND" y "GRANVILLE" se desprendieran del CT79.1 y pasaran a constituir el CT79.4 junto con un buque tanque. Su misión era específicamente antisuperficie con vistas a un empeño misilístico posterior o simultáneo con el ataque aéreo".

"Se ordenó a los A4Q prepararse para un eventual ataque antisuperficie antes de la puesta de sol".

"La tripulación de guardia que en ese momento concurrió a la conferencia prevuelo estaba integrada por:

CC PHILIPPI
TC MEDICI
TN OLMEDO
TN ARCA
TF MARQUEZ
TN LECOUR

"Durante el transcurso del prevuelo el CC CASTRO FOX se acercó al CC PHILIPPI (más antiguo), quién sería el líder del vuelo y le murmuró al oído "Señor, considerando que este es el bautismo de fuego de la Escuadrilla, y que soy el Comandante, considero que debería ser yo quién ocupe el lugar del líder por lo que le ruego que cambiemos de puesto entre usted y yo", a lo que el CC PHILIPPI contestó que dejara que se cumplieran las listas de vuelo tal cual estaban escritas, y que el próximo turno sería el suyo - tal era el espíritu de la Tercera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque. (sabían cuáles eran las probabilidades)".

"Luego del prevuelo los pilotos quedamos "a la orden" esperando el llamado a los aviones, pero dado que la distancia entre las dos fuerzas navales (+ 200 MN) era superior al radio de acción de los A4Q para esa configuración de armamentos y perfil de vuelo (150 Mn) y que el tiempo disponible antes de la puesta de sol (18:00 hs,) no daba para acortar distancias, el vuelo fue demorado (el A4Q no operaba nocturno)".

"Aproximadamente a 18:00 hs.la FT79 cayó al Rumbo Sur, manteniendo el zig-zag, en la búsqueda de una posición favorable para el lanzamiento de aviones sobre la posición de la fuerza enemiga, que sería actualizada por el Tracker explorador en la madrugada siguiente".

"A 2007 hs. la flota tomó contacto radar sobre un blanco aéreo no identificado, setenta millas al sudeste del "25 DE MAYO", se tocó zafarrancho de combate y pocos fuimos los que dormimos esa noche.

El nuevo trozo de guardia de la Escuadrilla, integrado por:

CC CASTRO FOX
TN MARQUEZ
TN BENITEZ
TN OLIVEIRA
TN LECOUR
TN SYLVESTER

"Concurrió a la Sala Prevuelo para recibir la información necesaria para el ataque de la mañana. Catapultaje crepuscular a 06:00 hs. Los dos señaleros quedarían abordo (CC ZUBIZARRETA, TN ROTOLO). Misma configuración de ataque".

"Luego comenzó a bajar el viento, hasta que se canceló el ataque por poco redituable".

"En el ámbito del Grupo Aeronaval Embarcado esas horas son recordadas como "La noche del Banzai".

Durante el resto del día (0730 a 1800) se mantuvieron dos ILC y seis con bombas (MK-82) a 5 y 30 minutos del despegue respectivamente.

A 0900 se catapultó el 3-A-304 (CC PHILIPPI) de guardia ILC, mientras el 3-A-307 (TC MEDICI F.) debió abortar por fallas. A 1100 se catapultó el 3-A-307 (TF MARQUEZ), abortando por fallas el 3-A-304 (CC CASTRO FOX).

En ambos casos las alarmas eran producidas por aviones de la FUERZA AEREA que regresaban al continente. Este era uno de los problemas de falta de coordinación que el Grupo Asesor Naval en la FAS trataba de solucionar.

El 3 de mayo de 0730 a 1330 se cubrió una guardia de ILC (2 aviones a 5 m) en turnos de 1h 30 m por piloto y 6 aviones para ataque antisuperficie (3-A-301, 3-A-302, 3-A-312, 3-A-306, 3-A-305 y 3-A-314) en turnos de 3 hs. por piloto.

A partir de 1330, habiendo iniciado la Fuerza de Tareas 79 el repliegue, se incrementó el mínimo de secciones ILC a dos (3-A-304 y 3-A-307, 3-A-314 y 3-A-312).

De esta manera el número de atacantes también quedó en cuatro (3-A-301, 3-A-302, 3-A-305 y 3-A-306).

Una sección del primer turno 3-A-304 (CC PHILIPPI) y 3-A-307 (TC MEDICI F.) y las dos del último 3-A-304 (CC ZUBIZARRETA), 3-A-307 (TF OLMEDO) y 3-A-314 (TN LECOUR) fueron catapultadas y vectoreadas a lo que resultaron ser aviones de la FUERZA AEREA.

Desde el 4 al 8 de mayo se mantuvo sólo una sección de ILC.

El 9 los 8 aviones aterrizaron sin novedad en COMANDANTE ESPORA a 1630.

Ante la nueva situación, el COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL ordenó desplegar la Escuadrilla a la BASE AERONAVAL ALTE QUIJADA en RIO GRANDE.

El 12 de mayo despegaron los 8 aviones (en 4 secciones) de COMANDANTE ESPORA entre 0900 y 0930.

Dos secciones (4 aviones) debieron regresar a COMANDANTE ESPORA por fallas, los otros cuatro aterrizaron en RIO GRANDE entre 1300 y 1330.

De los que regresaron por fallas, dos arribaron a RIO GRANDE el 13 y los dos restantes, el 14. Todos ellos acompañados por el infaltable avión de transporte, llevando personal y material.

De esta forma, la Escuadrilla completó sus 8 aviones y 12 pilotos.

A partir de la mañana del 14 se comenzó a cubrir guardia en configuración de ataque con 4 bombas MK-82 SNAKEYE y dos tanques auxiliares de 300 galones de combustible.

Se armó una división para cumplir la misión que se ordenara, uno de reserva y otro con sistema de reaprovisionamiento en vuelo a fin de asistir a los que regresara con problemas de combustible, ya que se iba a operar en el límite del radio de acción.

Desde el 15 de mayo, se mantuvieron 6 aviones en configuración de ataque, más el reserva y el tanquero.

A tal efecto se organizaron dos divisiones con los siguientes pilotos:

División 1	División 2
1- CC CASTRO FOX	1- CC PHILIPPI
2- TC MEDICI F.	2- TF MARQUEZ
3- TN BENITEZ	3- TN ARCA
4- CC ZUBIZARRETA	4- TN ROTOLO
5- TN OLMEDO	5- TN LECOUR
6- TN OLIVEIRA	6- TN SYLVESTER

El día 18 en un incidente durante la puesta en marcha, se averió el tanque de reaprovisionamiento en vuelo del 3-A-302. Ello significó operar por el resto del conflicto sin este valioso sistema.

Se intentó verificar la posibilidad de operación coordinada con SUE.

Para ello el 19 se realizó un vuelo de 2 A-4-Q (CC PHILIPPI - TC MEDICI F.) y 1 SUE (CC CURILOVIC).

Aquí es de destacar la permanente integración, intercambio de información y asesoramiento entre la 2° y 3° Escuadrilla y el Grupo de aviones MV DAGGER de la FUERZA AEREA.

El día 20 volvió a quedar en servicio el 3-A-302 (TN ROTOLO) pero sin su sistema de reaprovisionamiento.

El 21 de mayo, las fuerzas británicas desembarcaron en SAN CARLOS.

Ese mismo día el COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL ordenó un ataque, por lo que a 1010 hs. decoló la 1° División para atacar unidades navales en el Estrecho de SAN CARLOS.

1- 3-A-301 CC CASTRO FOX
2- 3-A-307 TC MEDICI F.
3- 3-A-312 TN BENITEZ
4- 3-A-306 CC ZUBIZARRETA
5- 3-A-304 TN OLMEDO
6- 3-A-305 TN OLIVEIRA

El líder y sublíder (3-A-301 y 3-A-306) tenían los aviones equipados con los dos únicos VLF con que contaba la Escuadrilla.

Ambos equipos no funcionaron correctamente y motivaron que los aviones recalaran en puntos de las islas no previstos.

Luego de 15 minutos de búsqueda de blancos, y aproximándose a su nivel de combustible para el regreso, los 6 aviones regresaron a RIO GRANDE, aterrizando a 1210.

La misión fue planificada y ejecutada sin reabastecimiento en vuelo por estar la zona del objetivo dentro del radio de acción de los aviones.

Es de destacar que los VLF en los A-4-Q no suministraban ninguna indicación visual (puntero o aguja) sino solamente el rumbo magnético (previo haber introducido la declinación) y la distancia, desde la posición actual al objetivo.

Por la tarde, el COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL ordenó otro ataque a los buques que se encontraban en el Estrecho de SAN CARLOS.

Por fallas de los VLF del 3-A-301 y 3-A-306, se estaba procediendo a su reparación, de modo que el Comandante de la Escuadrilla decidió el despegue por secciones de tres aviones, configurados con 4 bombas MK-82 (500 lbs) cada una.

La primera sección despegó a 1410 hs. compuesta por:

1- 3-A-307 CC PHILIPPI
2- 3-A-314 TF MARQUEZ
3- 3-A-312 TN ARCA

La segunda sección, con los VLF reparados, despegó a 1425, compuesta por:

1- 3-A-306 TN ROTOLO
2- 3-A-305 TN LECOUR
3- 3-A-301 TN SYLVESTER

La primera sección recaló en la boca sur del Estrecho y se recostó sobre la costa Oeste de la Isla SOLEDAD cayendo al Norte.

Avistó, atacó y hundió la Fragata HMS "ARDENT", luego fueron atacados por dos Harrier, que derribaron al 3-A-307 (CC PHILIPPI) quien se eyectó, al 3-A-314 (TF MARQUEZ) que falleció al explotar su avión. El 3-A-312 (TN ARCA) recibió impactos que averiaron su avión, dirigiéndose a PUERTO ARGENTINO, donde se eyectó y fue rescatado por un helicóptero del EJERCITO.

Los detalles de esta misión figuran en "OPERACION ARDENT".

Mientras tanto, la segunda sección que venía 15 minutos detrás de la primera, recaló en vuelo rasante en la Isla de los PAJAROS, cruzó la boca sur del estrecho y sobrevolando la costa Oeste de la Isla SOLEDAD, se dirigió hacia la Bahía de SAN CARLOS.

Alertados por la comunicación de eyección del CC PHILIPPI, cerraron formación en columna y, al llegar a la bahía RUIZ PUENTE, avistaron una formación de varios buques de guerra.

EL TN ROTOLO asignó como blanco al primero que vio, el cual fue identificado en el informe posterior al vuelo como una Fragata tipo 21, iniciando los tres aviones la aproximación y manteniéndose en columna.

El ataque fue realizado en vuelo rasante a una altura de 300 pies y lanzando cada avión 4 bombas MK-82 de 500 lbs.(equipadas con cola retardante) en reguero sobre el mismo blanco.

Las bombas del TN ROTOLO horquillaron el blanco, una de las bombas del TN LECOUR pegó en el agua junto a la borda del buque, muy posiblemente dentro de su ancho vulnerable, desapareciendo la nave dentro de una gran humareda negra y, finalmente, el TN SYLVESTER, que apuntó al medio de la columna de humo, avistó la silueta del buque cayendo con todo timón a babor, atacándolo por su aleta de babor. Obviamente las consecuencias del tercer y último lanzamiento no pudieron ser verificadas.

Los tres aviones efectuaron su escape a través del fuego antiaéreo concentrado de los otros buques, cruzaron el Estrecho y se confundieron con el terreno de la Isla GRAN MALVINA.

Arribaron a RIO GRANDE a 1630, con bajo nivel de combustible y exhibiendo las averías propias del combate.

El 3-A-305 tenía un impacto en el parabrisas y el 3-A-301 agujeros en su tanque suplementario de combustible y en la válvula de dampeo.

Los detalles están registrados por los relatos del TN ROTOLO y TN SYLVESTER en "MISION ESTRECHO DE SAN CARLOS".

El día 22 se prepararon dos misiones de ataque a blancos navales. La primera se anuló cuando los pilotos estaban por poner en marcha y la segunda, cuando estaban listos a despegar.

El motivo de la suspensión fue la mala meteorología en la zona del objetivo.

Estas misiones iban a ser cumplidas por cuatro aviones y los pilotos era: CC CASTRO FOX, CC ZUBIZARRETA, TN OLIVIERA y TN BENITEZ.

El 23, los mismos pilotos y aviones pusieron en marcha y rodaron a cabecera para atacar un blanco de superficie al este del ESTRECHO DE MAGALLANES.

Antes del despegue, un BE-200 (4-G-43 CC SOLA), que había despegado de RIO GRANDE a 0827 para investigarlo, informó que era un mercante propio, por lo que se anuló la misión. El 4-G-43 aterrizó a 1016.

A 1230 del mismo día, en la cuarta oportunidad que se les asignaba una misión, la división mencionada despegó para atacar blancos navales en Puerto SAN CARLOS.

La división estaba compuesta por:

1- 3-A-301 CC CASTRO FOX
2- 3-A-302 TN BENITEZ
3- 3-A-306 CC ZUBIZARRETA
4- 3-A-305 TN OLIVEIRA

La misión se realizó con reaprovisionamiento en vuelo con un KC-130. Durante el mismo, el 3-A-305 no pudo completar sus tanques auxiliares, por lo que debió regresar a RIO GRANDE.

Los tres aviones restantes cruzaron la Isla GRAN MALVINA por el Norte y, apenas llegaron al estrecho, vieron sus blancos.

Bajo un intenso fuego antiaéreo proveniente de la costa y los buques, el 3-A-301 lanzó sus 4 bombas MK-82 sobre un buque tipo asalto anfibio (posiblemente HMS "INTREPID"), escapando al frente.

El 3-A-302 atacó una Fragata tipo 21 que estaba a popa del anterior, lanzó tres bombas (la cuarta no salió) y escapó por izquierda.

El 3-A-306 atacó un tercer buque fondeado en PUERTO CHANCHO, pero ninguna de sus bombas salió, por fallas en el lanzador MER.

La Fragata tipo 21, HMS "ANTELOPE", posiblemente atacada por el TN BENITEZ, terminó con dos bombas alojadas en su interior, que no explotaron. En algunas publicaciones se menciona que eran: una de 500 lbs (utilizadas por A.R.A.) y otra de 1000 lbs (utilizadas por la F.A.A.). En otras, figura que eran de 1000 lbs. Por la noche, cuando intentaban desactivarlas, estalló una de ellas motivando el posterior hundimiento durante la mañana del día 24.

El escudo de ese buque se encuentra en el COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL, a quien fuera presentado en oportunidad de su anterior visita al país.

Luego del ataque, el CC CASTRO FOX, observó que uno de sus tanques auxiliares no había transferido, por lo que su autonomía se vio seriamente disminuida. Decidió eyectar todas las cargas subalares (tanques y MER) y ascendió, haciendo caso omiso a las PACs de Harriers, a fin de reducir el consumo de combustible. Aterrizó en RIO GRANDE después de un regreso solo, prácticamente sin combustible. FT50 largó un helicóptero PUMA de la PREFECTURA NAVAL en su apoyo. Afortunadamente no fue necesario.

Los otros dos aviones lograron reunirse luego de completado su escape individual.

Al aterrizar, el 3-A-306, a causa de bandejones de hielo en la pista y viento cruzado fuerte, reventó una cubierta y comenzó a desviarse de su corrida saliendo de la pista.

Al salirse, se cortó el parante de nariz, por lo que el CC ZUBIZARRETA sabiendo que llevaba una bomba que no había salido y cumpliendo con las normas, se eyectó en una posición de nariz abajo, por lo que salió hacia adelante, impactando en el suelo. Fue trasladado al hospital de RIO GRANDE, donde falleció poco tiempo después.

El avión pudo ser recuperado y siguió volando a partir del 11 de junio.

En noviembre de ese año se destruyó durante un adiestramiento nocturno en proximidades de la BASE AERONAVAL COMANDANTE ESPORA, falleciendo su piloto el TC LOUBET JAMBERT.

Los detalles de este ataque se detallan en "ATAQUE A PUERTO SAN CARLOS".

Es de destacar que en alguna publicación se menciona que los TABANO (indicativo que no utilizó la ARMADA) "no pudieron penetrar la defensa aérea en SAN CARLOS" regresando a RIO GRANDE. El ataque de esta división y la posible bomba MK-82 alojada sin explotar en el interior de la ANTELOPE prueban lo contrario.

El día 24 la Escuadrilla, con 4 aviones en servicio, cubrió una guardia de dos aviones, el 3-A-301 (TN OLIVEIRA) y 3-A-302 (TF OLMEDO). No surgió ninguna misión para ellos.

El 25 de mayo se planificó una misión de reconocimiento armado en Bahía SAN JULIAN (al W de GRAN MALVINA), pero se debió suspender por fuerte viento fuera de límites y pista mojada.

El día 26 se cumplió esta misión con el 3-A-301 (TF OLMEDO) y 3-A-302 (TC MEDICI). Llegaron a la zona del objetivo sobrevolándolo sin encontrar blancos, regresando a RIO GRANDE.

La misión se realizó sin reaprovisionamiento en vuelo, despegando a 0927 y aterrizando a 1117.

En el aterrizaje, con viento calmo, pista mojada y las 4 MK-82 en su estación central, el 3-A-302 reventó una cubierta, debiendo enganchar en el cable de final de pista.

Esa tarde, a 1437 despegaron el 3-A-301 (TN ROTOLO) y el 3-A-302 (TN OLIVEIRA) para realizar un reconocimiento armado antisuperficie en proximidades de la Isla BOUGANVILLE (E. de Isla SOLEDAD).

A 1300 se reunieron con el KC-130 para reaprovisionamiento. El 3-A-301 no pudo completar sus tanques auxiliares, por lo que debieron regresar a RIO GRANDE, aterrizando a 1530.

El 27 despegaron a 0927 el 3-A-301 (TN OLIVEIRA) y 3-A-302 (TF OLMEDO) para otro reconocimiento armado antisuperficie en CABO BELGRANO y Bahía SAN JULIAN. Ambos aviones aterrizaron en RIO GRANDE a 1130 sin haber obtenido contacto.

El día 28 se efectuó un nuevo reconocimiento armado, ahora en PUNTA FEDERAL, para lo cual despegaron a 1120 el 3-A-301 (TN SYLVESTER) y 3-A-302 (TN LECOUR).

No se pudo cumplir la tarea por meteorología adversa sobre el objetivo.

La Escuadrilla contaba con 4 A-4Q (3-A-301/3-A-302/3-A-304 y 3-A-305) todos ellos sin servicio por diferentes fallas.

El 7 de junio volvieron a tener aviones en servicio, realizándose vuelos de adiestramiento táctico en ISLA DE TIERRA DEL FUEGO (3-A-301 TF OLMEDO, 3-A-305 TC MEDICI).

El 8 despegaron de RIO GRANDE a 0847 el 3-A-301 (TN OLIVEIRA) y el 3-A-305 (TF OLMEDO) para ejecutar un ataque en ISLA BROQUEN.

Se estimaba que desde allí operaban helicópteros británicos.

A 0914 completaron su reaprovisionamiento en vuelo con un KC-130 y, ya en el área del objetivo, divisaron una casilla y un bote. Lanzaron 5 MK-82 en la construcción y regresaron para aterrizar a 1052 en RIO GRANDE.

El 9 el 3-A-301 (TN ROTOLO) y 3-A-302(TC MEDICI) despegaron de RIO GRANDE a 1435 para atacar un buque de desembarco encallado en la Bahía FITZ ROY.

Cuando estaban a 19 minutos del blanco, el BE-200 retrasmisor de comunicaciones (4-G-44 que había despegado a 1411) les informó que había tres PACs de Harriers protegiéndolo, por lo que se suspendió la operación.

Esta misión también fue ejecutada con reaprovisionamiento en vuelo (1505 hs.). El 4-G-44 aterrizó en RIO GRANDE a 1611 y los 2 A4Q a 1615.

El 10 de junio se efectuaron vuelos de adiestramiento local (3-A-302 TN BENITEZ) y el 11, un vuelo de prueba (3-A-306 TN SYLVESTER).

El 12 de junio la Escuadrilla cumplió su última misión, despegando a 1430 el 3-A-301 (TN ROTOLO) y 3-A-302 (TC MEDICI) para atacar piezas de artillería al norte de NORTH BASIN.

A 1448 cargaron combustible de un KC-130. En proximidades del blanco, y próximos a iniciar el ataque, se cruzaron con dos Harriers, lo que obligó a eyectar las cargas externas y regresar a RIO GRANDE, donde aterrizaron a 1640.

Este es un caso típico de los tres factores mencionados en la Introducción. Distinta autonomía en zona (a favor de los Harriers), control desde un buque (a favor de los Harriers) y armamento (los Harriers en configuración contraérea y los A-4Q en configuración de ataque).

La Escuadrilla comenzó las operaciones con 12 pilotos y 8 aviones.

Se perdieron dos pilotos (CC ZUBIZARRETA y TF MARQUEZ) y tres aviones (3-A-307/3-A-312/3-A-314).

Cumplió 39 salidas operativas (9 de interceptación y 30 de ataque).

Lanzó 35 bombas MK-82 (30 sobre blancos navales y 5 sobre terrestres) y disparó 662 tiros de munición de 20 mm.

Con pocos aviones y pilotos, pero estos bien adiestrados y conocedores de sus tareas, los resultados obtenidos fueron:

Hundimiento de la Fragata HMS "ARDENT"
Hundimiento de la Fragata HMS "ANTELOPE" (posible)
Averías en una Fragata tipo COUNTY
Averías en una Fragata tipo 21 (probable)

La TERCERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE siguió funcionando como tal hasta 1986.

En 1987, con sólo dos aviones (3-A-302 y 3-A-309) pasó a depender de la 2ª ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE.

El último avión en servicio, el 3-A-302, realizó su último vuelo en febrero de 1988 desde la BASE AERONAVAL COMANDANTE ESPORA hasta el Aeroparque de la Ciudad de BUENOS AIRES para ser utilizado en la ESCUELA DE MECANICA DE LA ARMADA como material de instrucción.

Allí está todavía, prestando servicios en la ARMADA.

En reconocimiento, fuselajes del A-4-Q se encuentran en pedestales en la Sede del ESTADO MAYOR GENERAL DE LA ARMADA (Edifico LIBERTAD), BASE NAVAL PUERTO BELGRANO, MUSEO AERONAVAL (BASE AERONAVAL COMANDANTE ESPORA), MUSEO NAVAL DE LA NACION (TIGRE) y AEROCLUB MAR DEL PLATA (de donde procedía el TF MARQUEZ).

5. MENCIONES

Su Bandera de Guerra fue condecorada por:

"HONOR AL VALOR EN COMBATE"

Por: "EJECUTAR OPERACIONES DE ATAQUE EN SITUACIONES DE MAXIMA OPOSICION, ADVERSAS CONDICIONES DE SEGURI DAD Y METEOROLOGICAS, CONTRIBUYENDO A PRODUCIR SIGNIFICATIVAS BAJAS AL PODER NAVAL ENEMIGO".

La NACION ARGENTINA condecoró al CC CARLOS M. ZUBIZARRETA y al TF MARCELO MARQUEZ por:

"MUERTO EN COMBATE"

La ARMADA condecoró a los siguientes pilotos de la ESCUADRILLA por:

"HONOR AL VALOR EN COMBATE"

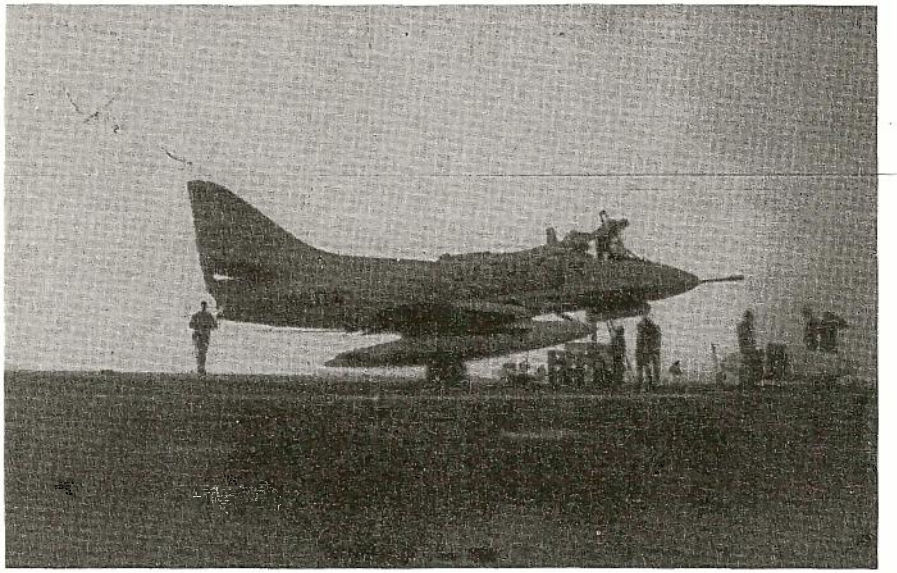
CC RODOLFO A. CASTRO FOX por: "COMO COMANDANTE DE LA TERCERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE, PARTICIPAR EN CONDICIONES FISICAS DISMINUIDAS A CAUSA DE UN ACCIDENTE DE AVIACION ANTERIOR, DANDO PERMANENTE EJEMPLO A SUS SUBORDINADOS".

CC ALBERTO J. PHILIPPI por: "CONDUCIR UNA DIVISION DE AVIONES QUE ATACO CON EXITO UNIDADES NAVALES ENEMIGAS EN ESTRECHO SAN CARLOS, EYECTARSE COMO CONSECUENCIA DE LAS AVERIAS PRODUCIDAS EN SU AERONAVE Y SOBREVIVIR EN PENOSAS CONDICIONES HASTA SER RESCATADO".

TN JOSE C. ARCA por: "ATACAR EFICAZMENTE UNIDADES NAVALES ENEMIGAS EN ESTRECHO SAN CARLOS Y, SER SERIAMENTE AVERIADO, DIRIGIRSE A PUERTO ARGENTINO, INTENTANDO SALVAR SU AVION, NO ABANDONARLO HASTA QUE LA TORRE DE CONTROL, POR EL ESTADO DE LA AERONAVE, LE ORDENO EYECTAR".

Plana Mayor de la Tercera Escuadrilla de Caza y Ataque durante el Conflicto Malvinas

Amunicionamiento de aviones SKYHAWK A4-Q en la cubierta del portaaviones A.R.A. "25 DE MAYO", durante el día 30 de marzo previo al frustrado ataque en aguas abiertas a la Flota Inglesa.



Avión SKYHAWK A4-Q en la cubierta del portaaviones A.R.A. "25 DE MAYO"

CAPITULO 41

OPERACION ARDENT

El 21 de mayo fue un día muy especial para las operaciones aéreas navales. Tropas británicas desembarcaron en SAN CARLOS.

El primer aviso de que algo estaba pasando lo dió el Teniente 1° ESTEBAN del Regimiento 25 de Infantería, quien estaba destacado con una patrulla en las proximidades de la Estancia SAN CARLOS y a 0810 informó a PUERTO ARGENTINO que había avistado cinco buques entrando por el NE del estrecho.

Se ordenó despegar una sección de aviones MC-33, de la que finalmente despegó sólo uno. (4-A-115)

Este avión debía efectuar un reconocimiento armado en la zona e informar al Comando de la Agrupación MALVINAS.

Arribado a la zona, el piloto (TN OWEN CRIPPA) confirmó y detalló el desembarco y su magnitud.

Esta información, retransmitida al Comando del Teatro del Atlántico Sur, permitió aclarar la situación e iniciar los ataques aéreos.

Completando la situación, PUERTO ARGENTINO informó que a 1000, el Portaaviones HMS "INVINCIBLE" se encontraba estacionado a 90 millas al NE y mantenía simultáneamente tres PACs (Patrulla Aérea de Combate) estacionadas 3 millas al W de SAN CARLOS.

Con la primera información, el COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL ordenó un ataque a blancos de superficie en la zona del desembarco.

La 3ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque planificó la operación con dos secciones de tres aviones cada una, despegando de RIO GRANDE a 1010.

Solamente el líder de cada sección tenía equipo de navegación VLF, que daba indicaciones erróneas.

Los seis aviones recalaron en un punto no previsto, buscaron durante 15 minutos y debieron regresar por autonomía, ya que no se efectuó reaprovisionamiento en vuelo, aterrizando en RIO GRANDE a 1210.

Por la mañana habían comenzado también los ataques de la FUERZA AEREA a los buques que estaban en el estrecho.

El COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL ordenó un nuevo ataque por la tarde.

La Escuadrilla volvió a organizarse en dos secciones de tres aviones compuestas por:

1ª Sección:

1-	3-A-307	CC PHILIPPI
2-	3-A-314	TF MARQUEZ
3-	3-A-312	TN ARCA

2ª Sección:

1-	3-A-306	TN ROTOLO
2-	3-A-305	TN LECOUR
3-	3-A-301	TN SYLVESTER

Al mediodía, la Fragata HMS "ARDENT" (F-184), cuyo Comandante era el Capitán de Fragata ALAN WEST, que cumplía tareas de apoyo al desembarco, fue atacada por dos PUCARA (My TOMBA y 1er. Tte. MICHELOUD) del Grupo 3.

La fragata estaba en la Bahía RUIZ PUENTE y cuando los avistó, abrió el fuego con su cañón de 4,5 pulgadas. Los aviones se retiraron pero volvieron a aproximarse, de modo que el buque les lanzó un Sea Cat, por lo que los PUCARA volvieron a retirarse.

Cuando regresaban, el My TOMBA fue derribado pudiendo eyectarse sin consecuencias.

Poco tiempo después, entraron por el Sur del Estrecho dos A4B (Cap.CARBALLO - Alf. CARMONA) del Grupo 5.

Por equivocación, el Alf. CARMONA lanzó sus bombas al RIO CARCARAÑA que estaba varado en la costa por ataques anteriores de Harriers. El líder le ordenó regresar, ya que se había quedado sin munición.

El Cap. CARBALLO avistó a la ARDENT y la atacó con sus dos bombas de 500 kg., mientras la fragata le disparaba con sus ametralladoras.

Las dos bombas horquillaron el buque sin obtener impacto y el A4B se retiró perseguido por dos Harriers, que lo perdieron.

Aproximadamente a 1400, la ARDENT fue atacada nuevamente, esta vez por tres M-V (Cap. MIR GONZALEZ - Cap. ROBLES y Tte BERNHARDT) del Grupo 6.

El buque recibió un impacto de bomba de 500 kg. en popa, que le dejó fuera de servicio el lanzador de SEA CAT y el helicóptero SEA LYNX (XZ 244).

En RIO GRANDE, a 1145 se recibió la información que a 1205 atacaron SAN CARLOS 8 A-4-C, a 1250 8 A-4-B y a 1330 10 M-III, todos de la FUERZA AEREA.

A 1400 personal del EJERCITO que estaba en PUERTO HOWARD avistó a 7 millas al sur una fragata averiada navegando hacia el SE (Sería la "ARDENT" después del ataque de los MV).

El buque no contaba con su sistema SEA CAT, no tenía hangar ni helicóptero y su cañón de 4,5 pulgadas no tenía posibilidades de ser amunicionado, pero podía seguir navegando sin problemas y a máxima velocidad.

Cuando la primera sección de A4Q estuvo lista, se le ordenó despegar, haciéndolo a 1410. La segunda lo hizo a 1425.

Los MV que habían estado operando en el estrecho regresaban a RIO GRANDE con uno de ellos en emergencia. La FT50 ordenó despegar un helicóptero PUMA (PA-13) de la PREFECTURA NAVAL para prestarle apoyo. Ambas aeronaves aterrizaron sin novedad, haciéndolo el helicóptero a 1458.

La información suministrada por el personal de PUERTO HOWARD a PUERTO ARGENTINO fue retransmitida a RIO GRANDE y al COMANDO DE LA AVIACION NAVAL y luego pasada a la primera sección, que estaba entrando por el sur del estrecho.

Al Comandante de la ARDENT le fue ordenado que invirtiera el rumbo hacia el NW para tener protección de los buques que estaban en la cabeza de playa.

La sección del CC PHILIPPI adoptó vuelo rasante sobre la costa W de la Isla SOLEDAD en busca del buque que se dirigía hacia el SE, pero éste estaba cayendo al NW.

Entrando por el Sur de la Bahía RUIZ PUENTE avistaron mástiles detrás de la roca "NORTH WEST ISLAND". Era la ARDENT que estaba saliendo para dirigirse al NW.

Los aviones efectuaron un giro suave a su derecha (hacia el NE) para iniciar su ataque con rumbo W, mediante un giro escarpado.

Al entrar en rumbo de ataque, el 3-A-312 (TN ARCA) quedó a la derecha del líder, como numeral dos y el 3-A-314(TF MARQUEZ), a la izquierda como numeral tres, ambos en formación balanceada.

El Comandante del buque relató que avistó "tres SKYHAWK de color claro" que lo atacaban por estribor. No hay duda que eran aviones navales.

El líder lanzó sus cuatro bombas MK-82 SNAKEYE de 500 lbs. en reguero y comenzó un giro a la izquierda, hacia el SW.

El TN ARCA, que venía segundo, le informó que una bomba había explotado en popa. Cuando entró en distancia de lanzamiento, lanzó las suyas, obteniendo otro impacto en la popa.

El tercer ataque (el TF MARQUEZ) aparentemente no obtuvo impactos.

Los dos pilotos siguieron al líder hacia el SW.

Una publicación inglesa menciona esta operación como "ataque con armas diseñadas expresamente para el lanzamiento a baja altura, apuntadas por pilotos perfectamente entrenados en el rol antibuque". (Gráficos 43 a y 43 b).

Cuando la primera sección iniciaba su aproximación al blanco, el CC SHARKEY WARD, que estaba cumpliendo una estación de PAC sobre la costa E. de la Isla GRAN MALVINA, avistó objetos blancos sobre el fondo oscuro del mar, advirtiendo que eran aviones que atacaban un buque, informando esto a su

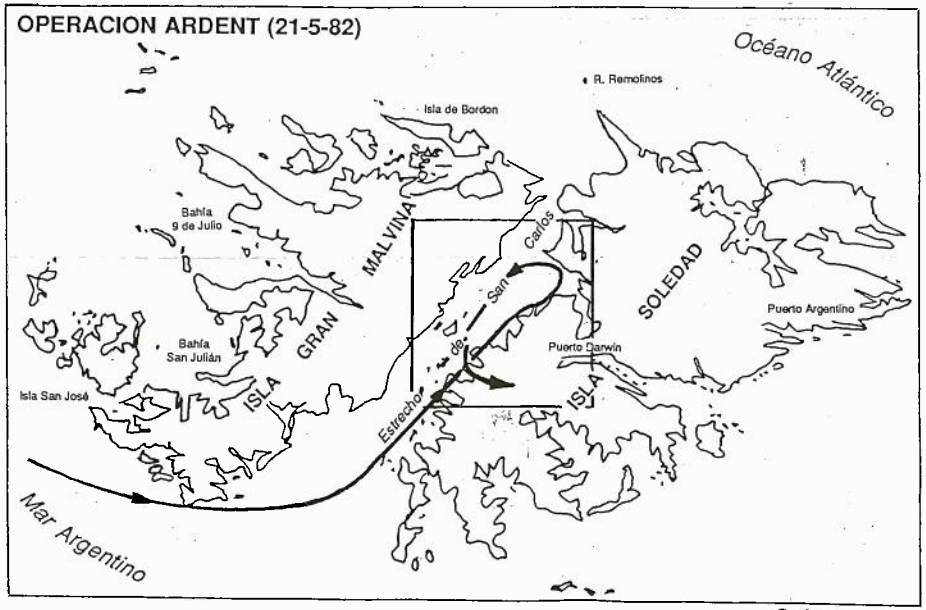


Gráfico Nº 43a

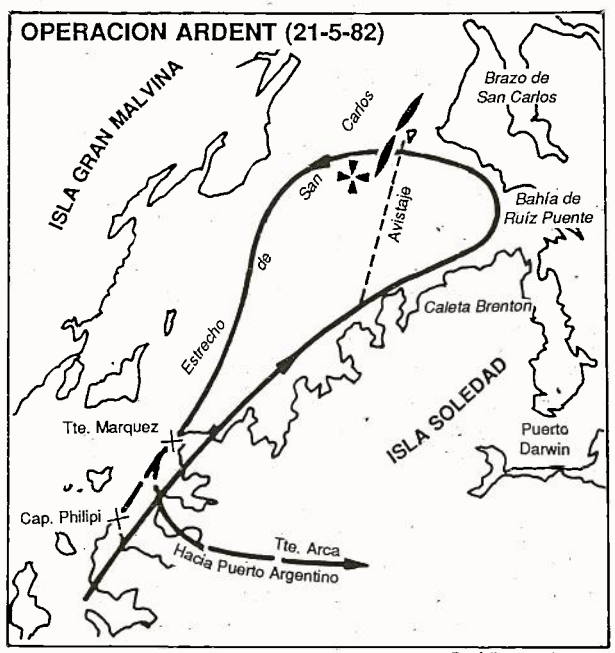


Gráfico Nº 43b

buque control, el Destructor HMS "BRILLIANT", y a otras PACs que estaban en zona.

Los británicos manifestaron que ese color gris claro los hacía muy visibles en vuelo bajo, razón por la cual, y como una de las enseñanzas de este conflicto, la ARMADA pintó todas sus aeronaves de color gris oscuro.

La ARDENT quedó muy averiada, escorándose con incendios a bordo y sin timón.

El CF WEST solicitó apoyo a la Fragata HMS "YARMOUTH", a cuyo bordo transfirió su tripulación.

En estas acciones murieron 22 tripulantes y quedaron 30 heridos.

El buque se hundió horas después en latitud 51°35'(S) longitud 59°13'(W). El Comandante manifestó que el último ataque fue letal.

Cuando los tres A4Q efectuaban su escape por el SW, una PAC de SEA HARRIERs de la Escuadrilla N° 800 de la Armada Británica (XZ 457 - TN MORELL y XZ 500 1° TENIENTE LEEMING) que estaba orbitando sobre GANSO VERDE escuchó el aviso dado por el CC SHARK y vieron las bombas explotando alrededor de la "ARDENT", por lo que buscaron hacia el S, avistando los tres A4Q. "Eran fáciles de observar pintados de blanco", manifestaron los pilotos británicos.

Los dos SEA HARRIER iniciaron su ataque desde 10.000 pies.

El TF MARQUEZ los divisó informando a los otros dos.

El CC PHILIPPI ordenó lanzar las cargas exteriores y tratar de entrar en las nubes cercanas.

El TN MOREL lanzó un Sidewinder al avión del CC PHILIPPI, que estalló en su cola. El avión quedó sin control, por lo que el CC PHILIPPI se eyectó.

El TN MORELL atacó después al avión del TN ARCA intentando lanzar su segundo Sidewinder, pero no salió. Luego le disparó toda su munición de 30 mm, sin observar impactos. Finalmente salió el segundo misil, pero se "desenganchó" y cayó al mar.

El 1er. Teniente LEEMIMG atacó el avión del TF MARQUEZ, volando ambos rasante.

La primera ráfaga de 30 mm no dio en el blanco, pero la segunda dio de lleno, explotando el avión.

El único A4Q que quedaba, el TN ARCA, tenía impactos en su ala izquierda, que perforaron los tanques ocasionando pérdida de combustible.

Los dos HARRIER regresaron por autonomía.

El 3-A-312, que además tenía problemas de control hidráulico se dirigió para aterrizar de emergencia en PUERTO ARGENTINO.

Cuando intentó hacerlo, la Torre de Control le informó que le faltaba el tren izquierdo, por lo que decidió eyectarse en la bahía.

Dado que existían campos minados en la costa hacia donde nadaba el TN ARCA, un helicóptero UH-1H del EJERCITO (Capitán JORGE SVENSEN), que no poseía guinche de rescate, se aproximó y hundió un esquí en el agua. El TN ARCA trabó una pierna en él y sostenido por el mecánico fue llevado a tierra.

Por esta acción el COMANDANTE EN JEFE DE LA ARMADA nombró Aviador Naval Honoris Causa al Capitán SVENSEN.

El TN ARCA permaneció en PUERTO ARGENTINO hasta la noche del 25 de mayo, en que fue evacuado en un C-130 de la FUERZA AEREA a COMODORO RIVADAVIA, junto con otros heridos.

En la tarde del 21 de mayo, el Comandante de la 3ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque (CC CASTRO FOX) tuvo que cumplir la desagradable tarea de informar a la familia del CC PHILIPPI, quien volaba A4Q como adscripto, que éste figuraba como "desaparecido en combate".

Mientras tanto, el CC PHILIPPI nadó hacia la costa de la Isla SOLEDAD y sobrevivió tres días en el terreno hasta que llegó a la casa de un "kelper", el Sr. TONY BLAKE, quien lo albergó, informando por radio a PUERTO ARGENTINO el día 25.

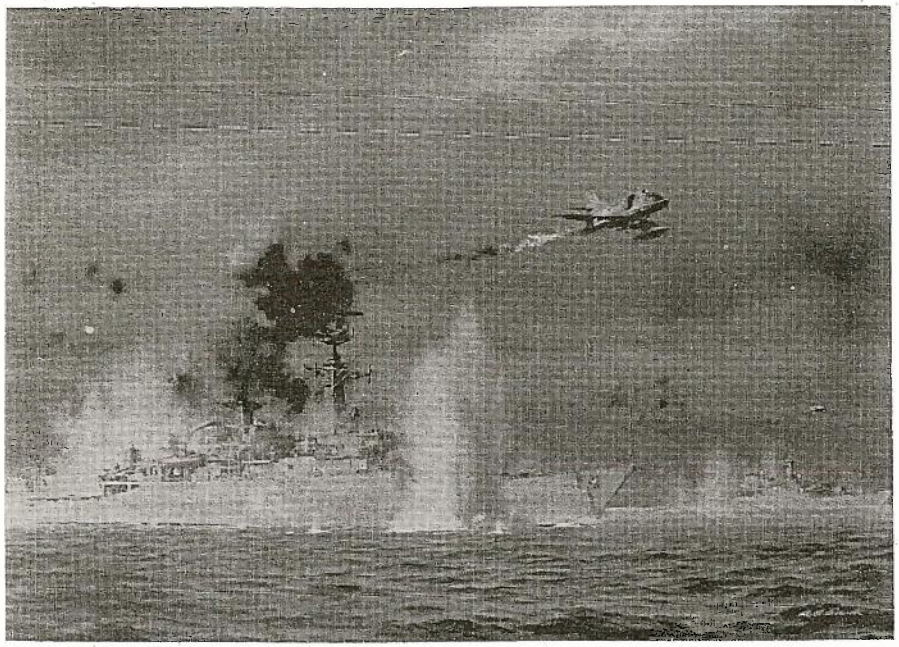
Inmediatamente esta noticia fue retransmitida a RIO GRANDE, donde el CF DABINI tuvo ahora la agradable misión de informárselo a la familia.

Por la tarde del 25 un helicóptero de la FUERZA AEREA lo evacuó a PUERTO ARGENTINO y el 30, un C-130 a RIO GALLEGOS. Ese mismo día un Sky-Van de la PREFECTURA NAVAL lo llevó de regreso a RIO GRANDE.

Por esta acción, el CC PHILIPPI y el TN ARCA recibieron la condecoración "HONOR AL VALOR EN COMBATE" y el TF MARQUEZ "MUERTO EN COMBATE".

NOTA: Según una publicación inglesa, la comunicación desde la casa de TONY BLAKE a PUERTO ARGENTINO fue interceptada por la inteligencia británica y se preparó una operación comando para tomar prisionero al CC PHILIPPI. Más tarde, la operación fue cancelada.

Según el Sr. MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK, autor del libro "THE FIGHT FOR THE MALVINAS", la "ARDENT" pudo haber sido atacada también por la 2ª Sección (TN ROTOLO), según figura en el Capítulo 43 "Misión al Estrecho de San Carlos".



Cuadro sobre la Operación ARDENT producido por el U.S. Naval Institute.

CAPITULO 42

LA TERCERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE CAPITAN DE CORBETA RODOLFO A. CASTRO FOX

1. Antecedentes

Los aviones A-4Q "Skyhawk" se incorporaron a la ARMADA a principios de la década del setenta, constituyendo la Tercera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque con asiento en la Base Aeronaval Comandante Espora.

Ha sido preocupación permanente de sus comandos la preparación de la unidad para el combate, y es así como alcanzó en muy poco tiempo niveles de adiestramiento que le permitieron operar con la máxima capacidad desde el portaaviones A.R.A. "25 de Mayo" y desde las bases aeronavales a lo largo del litoral marítimo.

Durante esta preparación y sobre la base de conocimientos adquiridos en el extranjero, así como la transferencia de experiencia propia de unidades de ataque de la AVIACION NAVAL reunida a lo largo de muchos años de operar en ejercitaciones con la FLOTA DE MAR, se fue formando una doctrina de ataque a unidades navales dotadas de defensas antiaéreas convencionales y de área.

La incorporación a la ARMADA de los destructores misilísticos tipo 42 lleva a la optimización de la doctrina de ataque. Primero con el Destructor A.R.A. "HERCULES" y luego con el Destructor A.R.A. "SANTISIMA TRINIDAD", se realizaron distintos tipos de aproximaciones para determinar los perfiles más adecuados para el ataque, y con la colaboración de un grupo de investigación operativa de la Universidad Nacional del Sur, dirigido por el Capitán de Navío (RE) Gerardo SYLVESTER, se establecieron las maniobras a realizar durante la aproximación para reducir el riesgo de ser derribado antes de lanzar las armas. El estudio se efectuó con las computadoras instaladas a bordo de esas unidades.

No existen dudas sobre la eficacia de tales unidades en aguas abiertas para la defensa de área; se llegó así a la conclusión de que había escasa probabilidad de vulnerar a una fuerza naval defendida por sistemas de armas semejantes.

En cuanto al lanzamiento de la munición de combate, dado que el A-4Q posee sistemas de armas convencionales y debe pasar por sobre el blanco, se

determinaron las maniobras necesarias para evitar la zona de esquirlas producidas por el atacante anterior, además de los retardos de armado y graduación de las espoletas necesarias, para no sufrir los efectos de los lanzamientos propios, asegurando una alta probabilidad de impacto y el efecto de explosión inmediata al penetrar el casco.

Para seleccionar el armamento adecuado se tuvieron en cuenta publicaciones extranjeras, de países de amplia experiencia de guerra, y la propia de los lanzamientos anuales con munición de ejercicio y de combate. El ataque en aguas abiertas era guiado por aviones que mantenían la exploración en contacto, ya sea operando desde a bordo con aviones S2-E "Tracker" o desde bases costeras con aviones P-2 "Neptune".

El conflicto Malvinas encontró a la Tercera Escuadrilla con una doctrina de ataque a unidades navales desarrollada, actualizada y una selección de armamento profesionalmente determinada. Esta doctrina fue transferida a unidades de ataque de la FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA cuando se iniciaron las acciones bélicas en el Atlántico Sur.

2. Historia de las operaciones

Pocos días antes del 2 de abril, la unidad recibió la misión de apoyar con sus aviones A-4Q la recuperación de las ISLAS MALVINAS, operando desde el Portaaviones A.R.A. "25 DE MAYO".

Esta tarea la cumplió sin llegar a entrar en acción, y al regreso a su base de asiento inicio el alistamiento de aviones y tripulaciones para las operaciones venideras.

Durante ese período realizó ejercicios de reabastecimiento en vuelo con aviones KC-130 de la FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA y optimizó los sistemas de navegación y las armas de los aviones. A mediados del mes de abril la Escuadrilla embarcó en el portaaviones y cumplió ejercitaciones de ataque a unidades de superficie, guiados por aviones "Tracker"; también coordinó ejercitaciones de interceptación de los aviones de la FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA, que operando desde bases en tierra realizaron ataques simulados a unidades navales.

Cuando la fuerza naval enemiga se aproximó al teatro de operaciones, la Unidad inició una guardia permanente de interceptores que cumplieron misiones sin entrar en contacto con el oponente; también mantuvo aviones a la orden listos a atacar unidades navales de superficie, lo cual no se concretó por

encontrarse los contactos establecidos fuera del radio de acción de los aviones.

A comienzos del mes de mayo y ante el cambio de la situación táctica, la Unidad se trasladó a operar desde las bases en tierra del teatro de operaciones; muy pocos días después estuvo lista para entrar en acción.

La Escuadrilla contaba con ocho aviones y doce pilotos cuando recibió su bautismo de fuego el 21 de mayo y realizó su último ataque el 12 de junio, cumpliendo en total treinta y nueve salidas.

Durante las acciones fueron derribados tres aviones propios por acción de la aviación enemiga. Así perdió la vida en combate el Teniente de Fragata Marcelo MARQUEZ y falleció el Segundo Comandante de la' Escuadrilla, Capitán de Corbeta Carlos M. ZUBIZARRETA al accidentarse en la Base Aeronaval Río Grande al regresar de una misión de ataque.

Los daños causados al enemigo fueron desproporcionados con respecto a la magnitud de la Unidad: el hundimiento de dos fragatas tipo 21 fueron acreditados a la Escuadrilla de acuerdo con los análisis de inteligencia.

Las misiones cumplidas fueron de ataque a blancos navales, reconocimiento armado y apoyo aéreo directo.

Estas misiones se realizaron en un teatro de guerra de características muy especiales, y la mayor desventaja para nuestra aviación de ataque fue la carencia del dominio del aire.

Los aviones de combate de la aviación argentina, que debieron operar desde el continente por no existir instalaciones adecuadas para aviones de alto rendimiento en las MALVINAS, llegaban al área de combate con escaso remanente de autonomía y el esfuerzo necesario en cantidad de vuelos para cubrir las horas del día, era de una magnitud de imposible cobertura con los medios disponibles.

A esta situación se sumó la falta de un buen control positivo radar, ya que en misiones a baja cota se perdían las comunicaciones con Puerto Argentino, debiéndose recurrir a aviones retransmisores situados fuera del alcance de la aviación enemiga.

También fue temible la eficacia del misil "Sidewinder" AIM 9L", de origen estadounidense, que utilizaban los aviones "Harrier". Operando desde portaaviones a menores distancias, ellos disponían de tiempo de combate adecua-

do en la zona y de un excelente control radar desde las unidades de superficie, factores que les permitían buscar las posiciones relativas favorables para el ataque; fue así como el 21 de mayo la sección integrada por el Capitán de Corbeta Alberto PHILIPPI, el Teniente de Navío José ARCA y el Teniente de Fragata Marcelo G. MARQUEZ, que en el estrecho San Carlos atacaron con éxito a una fragata tipo 21 HMS "ARDENT", en cuya popa hicieron impacto dos bombas de 500 libras, fue interceptada inmediatamente después del ataque, siendo alcanzado su líder por un misil que le hizo perder el dominio del avión y lo obligó a eyectar; su numeral, el Teniente ARCA, recibió impactos de 30 mm en su avión, obligándolo a dirigirse a Puerto Argentino, donde tuvo que eyectarse por las condiciones en que se encontraba el avión, que le imposibilitaban el aterrizaje.

En esa oportunidad desaparecía el Teniente MARQUEZ; al avistar los aviones enemigos se dispuso para el combate y eyectó sus cargas exteriores, pero fue abatido por disparos de cañones de 30 mm.

Otro inconveniente en el teatro de operaciones fue la desactualización de la información que inicialmente se obtenía, ya que la navegación hasta el avión-tanque, la maniobra para reaprovisionarse en vuelo y la navegación hacia el blanco insumían más de una hora.

Fue así como el día 21 de mayo la sección integrada por los Tenientes de Navío Benito I.ROTOLO, Roberto G. SYLVESTER y Carlos A. LECOUR, luego de atacar con éxito una fragata tipo 21 en el estrecho San Carlos, que Inteligencia dió como operando sola al sur del estrecho, durante la maniobra de escape debió sortear el fuego antiaéreo de otras unidades de superficie que se encontraban próximas y de las cuales carecía de información.

Una vez en tierra, las defensas antiaéreas establecidas por el enemigo ofrecieron una fuerte oposición.

El día 23 de mayo, en un ataque que conduje a Puerto de San Carlos, llevando como numerales al Capitán de Corbeta Carlos ZUBIZARRETA y al Teniente de Navío Marcos A. BENITEZ, no solo recibimos fuego cruzado de artillería antiaérea (Sea-Cat, esquivables con bruscas maniobras al poder observar su motor en ignición) desde las unidades de superficie, desplegadas en un arco orientado en la dirección probable de ataque, sino también desde tierra, con fuego de artillería y misiles.

Quizás el escaso preaviso de los ataques de que disponían los buques enemigos, al estar en aguas restringidas, y nuestra navegación rasante sobre el

terreno, ocultándonos tras sus elevaciones y exponiéndonos apenas un poco más de un minuto, no les permitía una mayor efectividad en sus sistemas de defensa antiaérea, pero la cantidad de granadas en el aire daban cuenta de muchas bocas de fuego que tiraban.

Durante este ataque se lanzaron bombas sobre un buque tipo asalto anfibio (posiblemente HMS "INTREPID") y una fragata tipo 21 (HMS "ANTELOPE").

Al regreso de esa misión, las condiciones meteorológicas en Río Grande, con pista húmeda y fuertes vientos cruzados en la pista, le ocasionaron problemas en el aterrizaje al Capitán ZUBIZARRETA, quien falleció al eyectarse cuando el avión se iba de pista.

El estado del tiempo presentó graves problemas para las operaciones, pues desde el 1° de mayo al 14 de junio, el 40 por ciento de los días presentaron condiciones adversas para las mismas.

Teniendo en cuenta la restricción de horas luz por la latitud y la altura del año, la diferencia de una hora en la puesta del sol sobre las MALVINAS con respecto al continente, la necesidad de mantener las pistas operables debiendo continuamente despejarlas de hielo, los requerimientos que imponía el tipo de armamento y las necesidades de los aviones de atacar en condiciones que les permitieran ver los blancos, se tendrá una idea de las reales dificultades que hubo que afrontar.

Los pilotos cumplían sus misiones conscientes de la imposibilidad de rescate una vez alejados más de 150 millas del continente (mitad de camino) debido a que los medios previstos inicialmente para esa tarea habían sido puestos fuera de servicio (caso del helicóptero abatido al tratar de recoger los náufragos del pesquero "Narwal" o el ataque al A.R.A. "Alférez SOBRAL" durante su misión de rescate de los tripulantes de un avión "Canberra" de la FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA).

La supervivencia en el mar en esas latitudes, aunque se cuente con traje antiexposición y bote individual equipado, es sumamente improbable.

La distancia a los blancos y los perfiles de ataque aplicados exigían las más de las veces el reabastecimiento en vuelo y navegación muy precisa para concretar las misiones; por ello se instalaron a bordo de los A-4Q sistemas de navegación modernos, gracias a un gran esfuerzo del Taller de Electrónica de la Base Aeronaval Comandante Espora, que lo concretó en unos pocos días.

Una vez asentado el enemigo en las islas y ante el requerimiento de misiones de apoyo aéreo directo de reconocimiento armado, se enmascararon los aviones con el apoyo del Taller Aeronaval Central, para operar sobre tierra, tarea que se realizó de noche para poder tener los aviones en servicio de día.

En estas misiones se encontró mayor oposición contraaérea; era significativo que luego del despegue desde el continente, el radar de Puerto Argentino daba las más de las veces un aumento en el número de PAC's (patrullas aéreas de combate) enemigas hacia la hora de arribo de los aviones. Eso también lo observaron en el escuadrón de aviones "Dagger" de la FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA que operaba en el mismo aeródromo y con cuyos integrantes nos ligaba una camaradería más allá de lo formal y del permanente intercambio de informaciones, experiencias vividas, alegrías compartidas por los triunfos y pesares sinceros por los caídos.

Algunos ataques no se concretaron, al entrar en contacto con el enemigo y tener que lanzar cargas exteriores para disminuir la gran desventaja que le representaba a un avión en configuración de ataque, el verse envuelto en combate aéreo con un avión interceptor dotado con misiles y de superior rendimiento. Otras misiones tuvieron que ser anuladas ya en las proximidades del blanco debido a condiciones meteorológicas adversas, cuando era común encontrar techos de nubes bajos y escasa visibilidad ocasionada por chubascos de nieve.

El esfuerzo logístico tuvo que ser desarrollado en horas nocturnas, cuando se cambiaban las partes averiadas por esquirlas (parabrisas y tanques de alas), se artillaban los aviones y se reparaban las fallas de estas aeronaves viejas, pero fieles y queridas.

Además de los pilotos mencionados, intervinieron en misiones de combate el Teniente de Navío Carlos OLIVEIRA, el Teniente de Fragata Alejandro OLMEDO y el Teniente de Corbeta Félix MEDICI.

El adiestramiento permanente y bien orientado hacia la misión de la Escuadrilla durante tantos años de preparación, hizo posible que con pocos aviones y tripulaciones, en condiciones de operación muy desfavorables, se causara un enorme daño al enemigo, con pérdidas propias relativamente bajas, pero no por ello menos sentidas. El Capitán ZUBIZARRETA y el Teniente MARQUEZ estarán siempre en nuestro recuerdo como ejemplos de entrega total en el combate. A ellos mi más profundo homenaje.

CAPITULO 43

MISION AL ESTRECHO DE SAN CARLOS (I)
TENIENTE DE NAVIO BENITO I. ROTOLO.

21 de mayo de 1982

A raíz de las fallas en los equipos VLF OMEGA en la misión de la mañana, la segunda sección integrada por el suscripto, TN ROTOLO, como líder en el 3-A-306, el TN LECOUR como numeral con el 3-A-305 y el TN SYLVESTER como sublíder con el 3-A-301, despegó 10 minutos después de la primera.

La idea era salir los seis aviones juntos, pero ya estaba aceptado que el mínimo para atacar buques era de tres.

Por tal motivo y debido a la urgencia de la misión, nosotros despegamos más tarde logrando tener los navegadores reparados.

Personalmente asumí sin dudas que nos íbamos a manejar solos porque los 10 minutos de demora no permitían volvernos a juntar en el aire con la primera sección. Es así que en la segunda sección fuimos todos conscientes que quizás el blanco que encontráramos no fuera el mismo que pudiera atacar la sección del CC PHILIPPI.

Luego del despegue tuvimos la confirmación de que los navegadores funcionaban bien dado que con el TN SYLVESTER, que tenía el otro, cambiamos información brevemente comparando valores y todo coincidía. Ascendimos al nivel de vuelo previsto para el perfil manteniendo escucha en el mismo canal de comunicaciones de la sección del CC PHILIPPI. Ellos intercambiaban mucho más información que nosotros, porque tenían que recalar en las islas en forma visual y por estima, lo que nos iba pintando a nosotros el panorama de lo que sucedía.

Era la primera vez que cruzábamos el "charco" como le decíamos a la distancia entre MALVINAS y el continente. Se podía observar el mar de vez en cuando, dado que había nubes a media altura, pero de todos modos no se podía evitar ese silencio abismal que se siente dentro de la cabina cuando uno piensa que el más mínimo inconveniente en el avión, significaba quedar perdido y solo en la inmensidad del océano.

Nuestra misión era la misma que la del CC PHILIPPI, con la condición de que si no encontrábamos el buque en la boca sur del Estrecho San Carlos había que dirigirse directamente a la bahía donde se estaba efectuando el desembarco.

Continuamos en silencio total y solo volví a cruzar información con el TN SYLVESTER para verificar si los dos navegadores coincidían, a fin de poder calcular el punto de iniciación del descenso.

En ese instante escuchamos a la primera sección que comenzaba a recorrer la zona de Cabo Belgrano con toda la descripción ya conocida, que hacía el líder.

Es así que nos íbamos enterando de la apariencia de la costa malvinense, la meteorología, lo "ancho del estrecho" en la boca sur, lo que significó un preaviso muy útil. Seguimos escuchando las comunicaciones y nos enteramos cuando iban navegando ya hacia el Norte por el borde Este del canal. Las comunicaciones entre los aviones de la primera sección eran fluídas y debido a que habíamos calculado el mismo recorrido, por cada punto que reconocían nos imaginábamos la posición que tenían.

Estábamos efectuando el descenso cruzando unos 5000 pies de altitud cuando escuchábamos que habían detectado un buque y lo atacaban. Como nuestra altura disminuía, no recibíamos ya todas las comunicaciones que se cursaban en el ataque y lo último que yo escuché cuando estábamos muy bajos sobre el agua es la voz de "MINGO ME EYECTO ESTOY..." y luego hubo silencio total. Interpreté que el Teniente SYLVESTER y el Teniente LECOUR habían escuchado lo mismo ya que ninguno efectuó comentarios. No cabían dudas que la primera sección había atacado a una fragata inglesa y que posterior al ataque algo les había sucedido.

Nosotros seguimos navegando rasante hasta recalar en Isla de los Pájaros con muy buena precisión, continuando sobre la carta hasta el Cabo Belgrano.

Era tal como lo había descripto el CC PHILIPPI y la zona estaba con visibilidad reducida y llena de chubascos.

Para mayor precaución antes de cruzar el estrecho, dado lo ancho que le pareció a la primera sección ordené la separación de aviones y la puesta de potencia máxima para estar listos a atacar si se nos presentaba algún buque adelante. Hay que destacar que el único preaviso para encontrar al enemigo eran nuestros ojos y la visibilidad no era mayor que tres millas, impidiendo además tomar la separación correcta entre aviones, lo que nos hacía más vulnerables aún.

Cruzamos el estrecho sin novedad y cuando llegamos a la otra orilla, la visibilidad era un poco mejor. El sol que ya estaba recostado al Oeste a veces aparecía entre los chubascos y los reflejos hacían imposible observar con nitidez

lo que había en el canal. Mi sorpresa fue también que la costa era muy baja, casi a nivel del agua, lo que me hizo pensar que la detección radar a pesar de estar sobre tierra podía ser muy buena.

Confiando en los navegadores, decidí meterme un poco más adentro de la isla para evitar ser detectado y para luego apuntar con un rumbo directo a la Bahía San Carlos. Con una breve comunicación constaté que mis numerales estaban de acuerdo con la modificación y volví a reclamar la separación casi en columna de los aviones, manteniendo el avistaje hacia arriba por los "Harrier". Navegamos así unos minutos hasta ver nuevamente por la izquierda el canal, ya con un poco más de visibilidad y observando al mismo tiempo que estaba a 2 minutos de cruzar la bahía RUIZ PUENTE, donde seguramente podríamos avistar algún buque enemigo.

Continuamos en silencio y ya próximos a la bahía, doblé mi carta de navegación para repasar la selección de armamento que habíamos hecho antes del cruce del estrecho. Como queriendo decir listos para el combate o quizás "suerte en lo que nos pueda esperar", pregunté: Están conmigo?. La respuesta fue un SI firme y muy animado del Teniente SYLVESTER y del Teniente LECOUR como dando por interpretado en forma muy clara el sentido de mi pregunta. Tantos años volando juntos que realmente en tales circunstancias pocas palabras eran suficientes para entenderlo todo.

No nos equivocábamos pues ni bien comenzamos a cruzar la bahía divisé un buque de guerra inglés en el medio del canal con rumbo hacia el sur del estrecho. Lo comunique inmediatamente a mis numerales y ordenando el ataque me lancé hacia él. Estaba a unos 90° de mi rumbo así que con un giro brusco quedé enfilado para la corrida. Los numerales divisaron el blanco y acusaron el recibido lanzándose al ataque detrás de mi.

Comencé con las maniobras evasivas a muy baja altura cuando observé que el buque comenzaba a disparar. Yo me encontraba a unas dos millas náuticas del blanco.

En ese momento el TN LECOUR me avisó que a la derecha sobre la costa había otro buque, lo identifiqué pero no nos disparaba, por lo que volví nuevamente a concentrarme en el fuego que efectuaba mi blanco. Veía las manchas blancas de humo en el buque que eran disparos de sus cañones (de 4,5" tal vez por su cadencia de fuego) y también observaba trazos negros y rojos que pasaban debajo de mi avión. Cuando noté que el fuego sobre mi avión era intenso paré las maniobras evasivas para tirar con mis cañones.

Estos fallaron, no salió ni un solo tiro. Allí comencé a zizaguear con mi avión en forma violenta. El buque seguía tirando y noté que avanzaba a más velocidad. De pronto me sentí cerca tiré atrás para alcanzar la altura de lanzamiento de bombas y cuando la mira cruzó sobre el centro del buque oprimí el botón sintiendo la salida de las bombas.

Cruzando ya por encima, identifiqué una fragata tipo 21 y me sentí tan expuesto que los 300 pies que tenía me parecían 3000. Tan alto me encontré que invertí el avión 120° y tiré hacia abajo pegándome rápidamente sobre el agua escapando con un rumbo 200°.

Cuando comenzaba a recuperarme de ese momento tan violento que fue el ataque, observé impactos de proyectiles sobre el agua, delante de mi avión. Allí me di cuenta que iba rumbo a otro buque que me mostraba todo el través y tiraba con todo su armamento antiaéreo, porque pude observar una cortina de fuego sobre mí.

Sin dudarlo efectué un giro brusco de 180° y pegado al agua me dirigí a la costa oeste del canal para alejarme rápidamente, al tiempo que informaba a mis dos numerales de la novedad y la trayectoria que estaba realizando para el escape. Sobre la costa había una pequeña elevación de unos 1000' de altura que pasé tirando violentamente atrás y escondiéndome detrás de ella pegándome al piso y completando mi escape por los cañadones de la isla GRAN MALVINA. Deseo mencionar que al trepar el morro observé otro buque delante mío recostado sobre la margen oeste, sin que me alcanzara a disparar.

A 480 nudos continué el escape entre las nubes que, en forma espaciada estaban a baja altura. Continué dando instrucciones de mi trayectoria a mis numerales y por suerte todos hicimos el mismo camino.

Cuando transcurrieron unos cinco minutos pregunté si estaban todos, y hubo un sí unánime y muy alentador. Mi exclamación fue espontánea:" qué suerte". Así nos comenzamos a reunir y a unas 70 millas náuticas del estrecho tuvimos que comenzar el ascenso por falta de combustible.

Estábamos cerca aún para trepar pero no había otra solución si queríamos llegar al continente.

Con el combustible marginal pero muy satisfechos por la misión cumplida volvíamos, ya en altura, sin grandes novedades.

A 150 millas de tierra se nos preguntó por los tres primeros aviones, respondiendo que no sabíamos nada. Evidentemente ya no volverían porque por el horario tenían que estar aterrizados.

Al arribar al aeródromo todos teníamos bajo nivel de combustible pero el TN LECOUR y el TN SYLVESTER contaban sólo para cinco minutos de vuelo.

Los aviones de estos pilotos estaban averiados en los tanques de ala y en el fuselaje por las esquirlas recibidas de las bombas lanzadas sobre el buque.

En cuanto al resultado del ataque voy a describir lo que vio en primer lugar el TN LECOUR, numeral 2 y el TN SYLVESTER, numeral 3.

El TN LECOUR que me alertó cuando nos lanzamos al ataque, sobre el buque que estaba a nuestra derecha, coincide en que no me disparó. Luego observó cómo pegaban en el agua las salvas del buque atacado, entre mi avión y el suyo.

También pudo observar la salida de mis bombas, cayendo éstas en un reguero centrado, 2 delante y 2 atrás sin que ninguna impactara directamente sobre el blanco. Según su impresión, el blanco quedó tapado por las explosiones y él pasando por el medio lanzó sus cuatro bombas pudiendo hacer buena puntería.

En su escape pudo ver el otro buque que yo tuve que esquivar, siguió mi camino y trató de evitar el fuego antiaéreo, que sobre él también fue intenso. Luego trepó sobre el morro a su frente y se metió en los cañadones hasta que nos reunimos.

El TN SYLVESTER pudo ver en forma más panorámica el espectáculo. Observó las explosiones de mis bombas y las del TN LECOUR.

Estas últimas también cayeron en un reguero centrado (2 adelante y 2 atrás del buque) pero con la particularidad que la tercera bomba cayó muy cerca del costado del buque sobre la aleta de babor.

Una vez lanzadas las bombas del TN LECOUR, él no pudo ver más al buque y tampoco éste le disparó. Siguió aproximándose hacia la columna de fuego, humo y agua y cuando estaba ya encima vió que el buque salía navegando entre las explosiones y allí lanzó sus bombas. Pudo hacer buena puntería y su lanzamiento fue correcto pero no pudieron evaluar dónde pegaron exactamente.

Luego de su ataque escapó por el camino señalado y evadiéndose del fuego enemigo se ocultó detrás de las elevaciones de la costa Oeste, completando la reunión en los cañadones de la isla.

Aún no hemos podido saber el verdadero nivel de daños que le causamos a ese buque como tampoco si hubo aviones HARRIER enemigos persiguiéndonos en el escape. Felizmente pudimos pasar entre cuatro buques ingleses, atacar uno de ellos y regresar con los aviones averiados pero en servicio, a RIO GRANDE. (Gráfico 44a y 44b).

NOTA: Con respecto a este ataque, MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK que escribió el libro "THE FIGHT FOR THE MALVINAS" (THE ARGENTINE FORCES IN THE FALKLANDS WAR) editado en 1987, escribió al CC ROTOLO en noviembre de ese año:

Estimado Capitán Rotolo:

Se acordará que cuando hablamos en Espora hace pocas semanas, Ud. me preguntó si yo podía identificar qué buque había atacado el 21 de mayo de 1982.

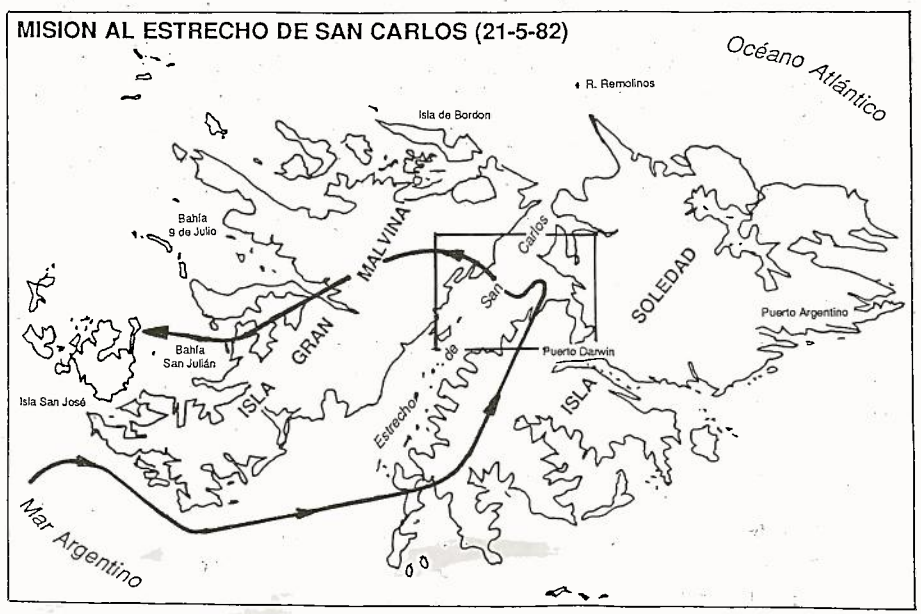


Gráfico Nº 44a

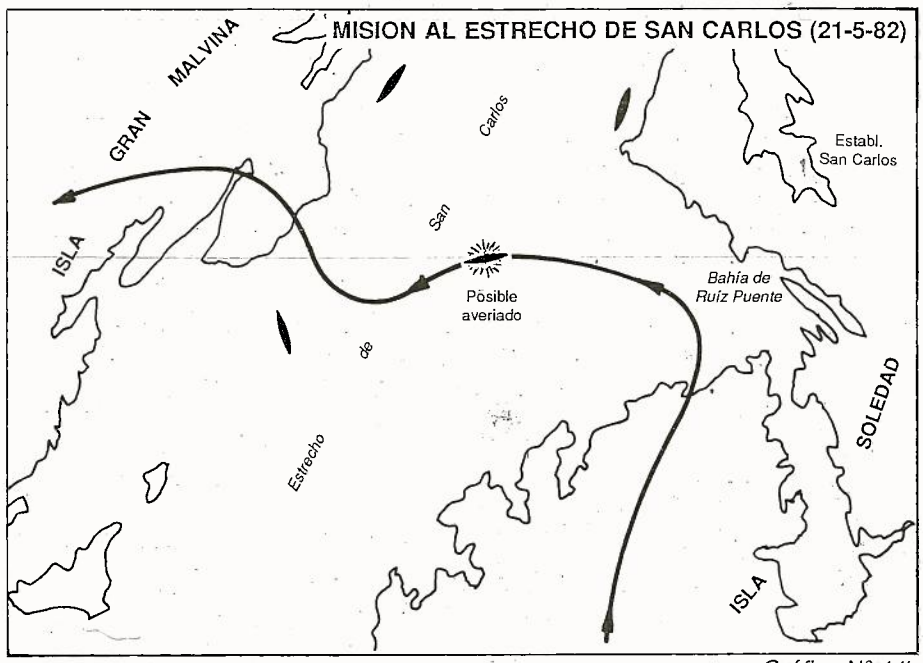


Gráfico Nº 44b

Yo he estudiado esto muy cuidadosamente y he llegado a la conclusión que Ud. **probablemente** (tal vez diría, casi seguramente) atacó **e impactó** la "ARDENT".

Yo creo que el suyo fue el cuarto ataque sobre la "ARDENT" ese día y fue el tercer ataque donde recibió impactos.

Creo que estos fueron los cuatro ataques:

1. Grupo 5 A4B - 1 avión (CARBALLO) - sin impactos.
2. Daggers - 1 impacto.
3. PHILIPPI - 2 impactos.
4. Su ataque por lo menos 1 impacto, posiblemente más.

El CF WEST (Comandante de la "ARDENT") me dijo que cree que siete bombas explotaron en la "ARDENT" y dos más impactaron pero no explotaron.

Mis razones para creer que el suyo fue el ataque número cuatro son:

1. Ud. asegura que atacó una fragata tipo 21; "ARDENT" fue la única tipo 21 presente ese día.

2. Si Ud. ha leído el libro de Ethell y Price "Guerra Aérea Sud Atlántica", en páginas 118 y 120 dice: "Otros Syhawks del Grupo 5 atacaron la "ARDENT" cuando estaba saliendo de Grantham Sound y la Fragata recibió otro impacto". No hay evidencias que el Grupo 5 haya impactado la "ARDENT" y yo creo que ese fue realmente el ataque de PHILIPPI. Luego, en página 120, dice: "Skyhawks de color claro (eran de A.R.A.) en línea a popa...por estribor". Ethell y Price luego describen este ataque como el de PHILIPPI. Pero PHILIPPI dice que su ataque fue por babor. Ud. atacó por estribor. De modo que yo creo que el suyo fue el último de los ataques que impactó a la "ARDENT". Creo que Ud. dió a la "ARDENT" el "golpe de gracia" y diré eso en mi libro.

Pero debo agregar una precaución. Hubo mucha confusión ese día, con muchos buques atacados por muchos aviones. Lo anteriormente dicho es lo que pienso que ocurrió, pero no estoy absolutamente seguro.

Espero que haya encontrado esto interesante y de ayuda. Envío mis mejores deseos para Ud., PHILIPPI y los otros pilotos, quienes me ayudaron cuando visité Espora.

Sinceramente
MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK

CAPITULO 44

MISION AL ESTRECHO DE SAN CARLOS (II)
TENIENTE DE NAVIO ROBERTO SYLVESTER

Después del regreso de la misión efectuada a la mañana (en la cual los aviones no encontraron el blanco por fallas en los sistemas de navegación VLF-OMEGA), hubo que distribuir la prioridad de salida de los aviones de acuerdo a la cantidad de fallas que era necesario reparar.

La primera sección (307, 312 y 314) despegó con los primeros aviones en condición de vuelo y nosotros 15 minutos después con los aviones 306, 305 y 301.

La misión era la misma, atacar a un buque averiado en la boca occidental del canal SAN CARLOS y de no encontrarlo, avanzar por el estrecho hasta la Bahía SAN CARLOS, atacando al primer buque enemigo que se avistara.

Sabíamos también antes del despegue, que había aviones en estación PAC sobre el estrecho, que no tendríamos escolta aérea y que no podíamos efectuar reaprovisionamiento en vuelo, pues los aviones KC-130 estaban comprometidos con los A-4 de la FUERZA AEREA.

La navegación fue exacta y recalamos en el punto previsto (Isla de los PAJAROS) en vuelo rasante. Giramos a estribor y fuimos rumbo a la Isla AGUILA, a fin de verificar la presencia del probable buque averiado en la boca del estrecho o, de lo contrario, poder seguir avanzando hasta la Bahía SAN CARLOS a través de la Isla SOLEDAD, es decir dejando al estrecho mencionado a la izquierda de nuestra derrota.

Escuchamos la comunicación de eyección del líder de la primera sección e inmediatamente intenté comunicarme con los numerales, sin obtener ninguna respuesta. Por lo tanto al cruzar la boca del estrecho, sabíamos que, además de la gran desventaja de no estar escoltados y de navegar en una zona perfectamente relevada por aviones interceptores enemigos en estación PAC, teníamos que asumir dos realidades: que los 3 aviones que nos antecedían habían sido derribados y que después del ataque en la bahía nos quedaríamos sin combustible para escapar a baja altura, por no haber efectuado el reaprovisionamiento correspondiente.

En silencio absoluto, los tres nos dábamos apoyo y creo que no hacia falta una sola palabra para expresar lo que sentía cada uno.

Cerramos la formación en columna a fin de permitirle flexibilidad al líder y no perdernos de vista y desembocamos en la Bahía RUIZ PUENTE.

Había cuatro buques, el líder asignó el más próximo e iniciamos la aproximación para atacarlo (el ataque lo efectuamos a baja altura, alta velocidad y con bombas de 500 lbs, armadas con cola retardada a fin de lograr la separación del avión antes de la explosión). Las bombas del Teniente ROTOLO horquillaron el blanco (la probabilidad no fue esta vez su aliada), una del Teniente LECOUR pegó en el agua junto a la borda en el costado de estribor, muy posiblemente dentro del ancho vulnerable del buque (estimamos Fragata Tipo 21) y la nave desapareció dentro de una gran humareda negra. Apunté con el avión al medio de la columna de humo y cuando estaba a punto de alcanzarla, la silueta del buque empezó a divisarse cayendo con todo timón a babor.

Ataqué por la aleta de babor y obviamente mi lanzamiento no fue verificado por ser el último numeral.

Perdí de vista a los aviones que me precedían, pero creo que hicimos exactamente el mismo camino para escapar, pasando entre los otros buques que nos hostigaban con tiro antiaéreo de cañones.

Tal como estaba calculado nos quedamos sin combustible y, ya debajo de la lotería calculada, iniciamos el ascenso sobre la Isla GRAN MALVINA. Al pasar por la Isla SAN JOSE tenía 25.000 pies de altura y durante varios minutos esperé ser derribado.

Aterrizamos en RIO GRANDE después de volar más de 2 horas sobre el mar, con combustible remanente para efectuar uno o dos circuitos de aterrizaje como máximo. Los aviones 301 y 305 traían como confirmación de su desempeño en combate, impactos en el fuselaje y cabina respectivamente.

No hubo ninguna alegría, en esa misión habíamos perdido el 50% de los aviones y hasta ese momento tres pilotos, que no tuvieron dudas en dar todo cuando les fue exigido por su Patria.

CAPITULO 45

ATAQUE A PUERTO SAN CARLOS
TENIENTE DE NAVIO MARCO A. BENITEZ

23 de mayo de 1982

La misión de la división era la de atacar prioritariamente unidades de superficie que se encontraban en el Puerto de SAN CARLOS y de no encontrarse ninguna de estas, atacar las instalaciones del Puerto. Teníamos cuatro aviones en servicio, el día 21 nos habían derribado a tres. La 1ra división se compuso del siguiente modo:

1 - CC CASTRO FOX
2 - TN BENITEZ
3 - CC ZUBIZARRETA
4 - TN OLIVEIRA

Dudábamos de poder llegar al objetivo dado que las condiciones meteorológicas en ruta no eran buenas y dificultaría la reunión con los aviones tanque para nuestro reabastecimiento en vuelo, Por este motivo el punto de reunión fue cambiado en vuelo y difería con el del punto original en 90 MN, punto que nos dejaba más cerca del planeado en prevuelo. Al reabastecernos el numeral cuatro (TN OLIVEIRA) tuvo inconvenientes en su transferencia de combustible no pudiendo llenar los tanques drops, por lo que tuvo que regresar a RIO GRANDE solo.

Reabastecidos los tres aviones restantes continuamos hacia el objetivo cumpliendo el perfil previsto: alto - bajo - bajo - alto, nos encontramos a 50 MN antes de llegar a GRAN MALVINA.

Volando rasante sobre el mar nos comunicamos con el retrasmisor de comunicaciones , que ese día se denominaba "RAYO", para que nos informara las novedades que tenía sobre el objetivo.

Nos contestó que aún no tenía ninguna novedad y que esperáramos porque en cualquier momento tenía que salir la división de A-4 de la F.A.A que había entrado.

Instantes después se escuchó al numeral 4 que trataba de comunicarse pero no era entendible su comunicación, sí pudimos escuchar al líder que informaba que estaba averiado y al numeral tres que constata que el N° 2 había sido derri-

bado. La proximidad al blanco nos impidió obtener más detalles y continuanos hacia el mismo sin saber qué situación había.

Volando rasante sobre la isla y a dos minutos del blanco, el líder deseo suerte y fue la última comunicación previa a entrar en contacto directo con el enemigo.

Al pasar lateral el monte ROSALIA, con la proa hacia el puerto, me sorprendió lo alto que quedamos sobre las aguas del canal, tuve que tirar "G" negativas para pegarme nuevamente al agua y ví que el Nº 1 hizo lo mismo, yo venía unos 100 mts. detrás y a la derecha y dejé de ver al numeral N° 3.

La meteorología en el lugar era muy buena y brillaba el sol, el agua se veía muy oscura y calma, al mirar al frente vi los buques, pude distinguir a cuatro, de los cuales los dos de mi derecha eran de guerra, el líder dió un pequeño giro y apuntó su avión hacia el más grande y que aprecié era un destructor Tipo COUNTY, yo apunté hacia el cuarto buque y que era una Fragata Tipo 21; se los veía gris perla, muy claros y parecían impecables, no había humo, ni incendios, ni rastros de combate previo, por lo que pensé que la división anterior habría atacado una Unidad en el estrecho.

Cuando llegamos a las puertas del brazo del SAN CARLOS, ante nuestra sorpresa ,empezaron a disparar desde tierra misiles superficie-aire. Se veían los fogonazos de salida y luego parecían bengalas rojas que venían hacia uno lentamente, una de ellas pasó entre los dos aviones; ya más cerca de los buques se vieron las explosiones de las granadas antiaéreas y noté que el cañón de proa tiraba hacia el N° 1.

Cuando por distancia directa ví que estaba en parámetro de tiro para cañones, apreté el gatillo e instantáneamente se trabaron, por lo que cambié de selector y apreté el de bombas, sentí la salida de las mismas y la nariz tendió a irse arriba, inmediatamente giré con 90° de inclinación de alas y me dirigí hacia el Norte al ras del agua para protegerme detrás de las sierras, en este momento un misil pasó justo frente a mí y creí que en cualquier momento era derribado.

Sobrepasadas las alturas todo era calmo y empezó mi preocupación por la PAC (Harrier) enemiga, pues según la información en el momento del despegue, había una sobre el objetivo, sobretodo sabiendo que había perdido mi única autodefensa, los cañones, que estaban trabados. Los escapes fueron individuales, una vez concentrado en mi buque dejé de ver a los otros dos aviones.

El regreso estaba planificado hacerlo por el mismo lugar por el que aproximamos, sí por éste no encontrábamos novedades, como no las hubo.

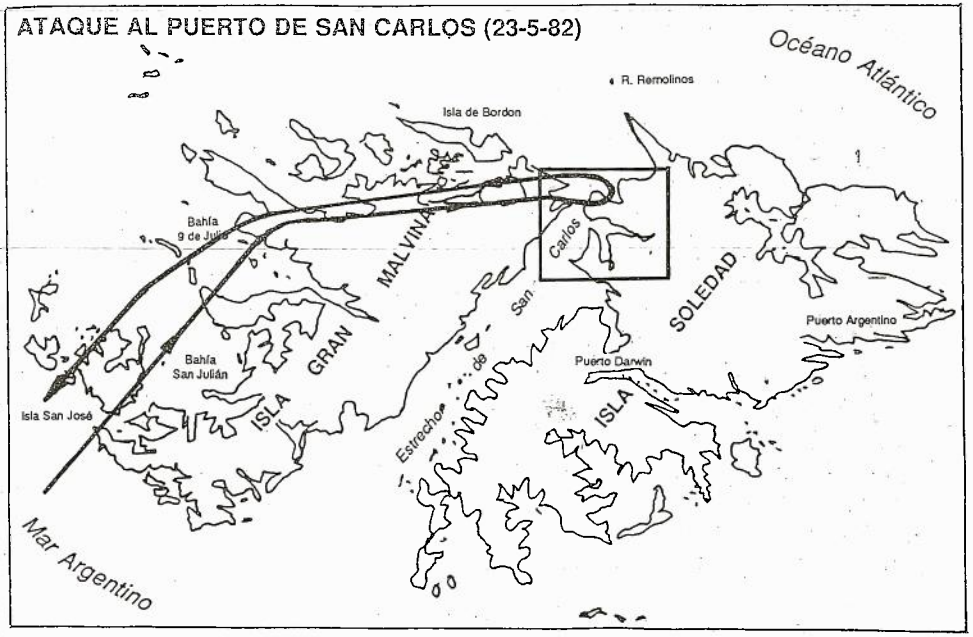


Gráfico Nº 45a

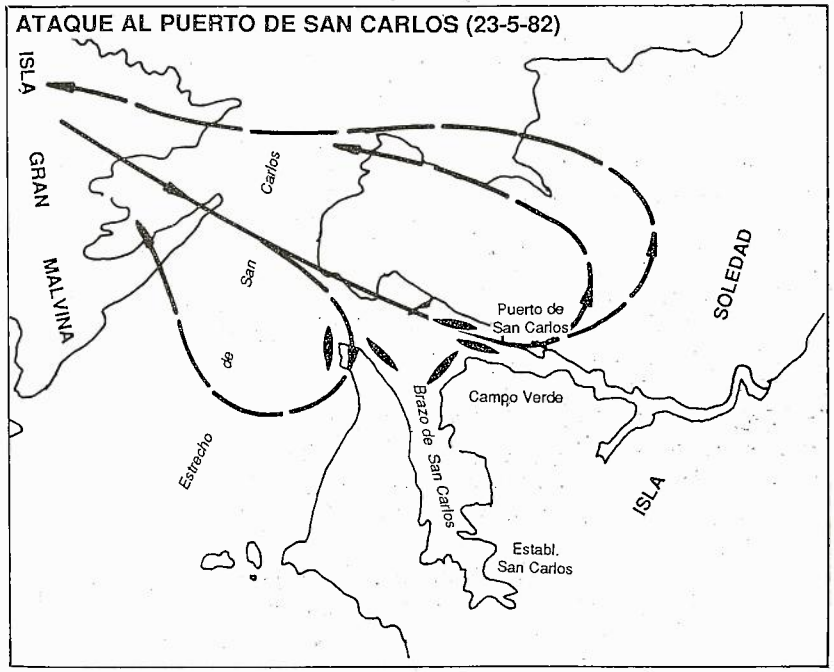
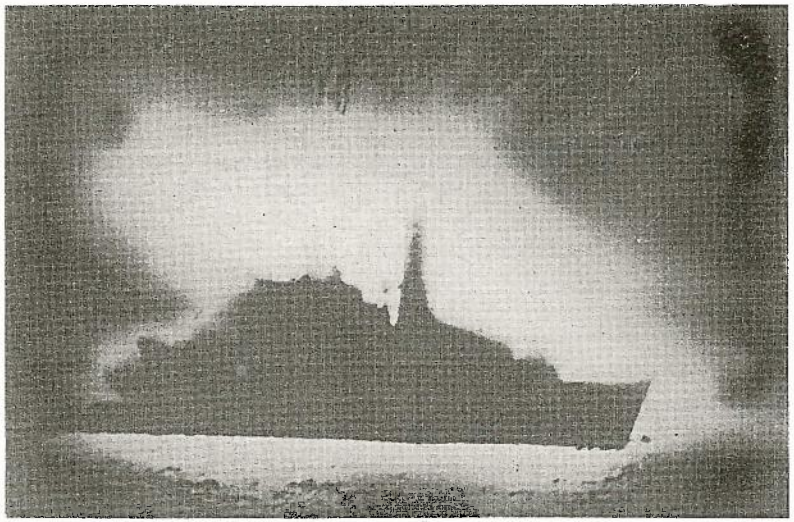


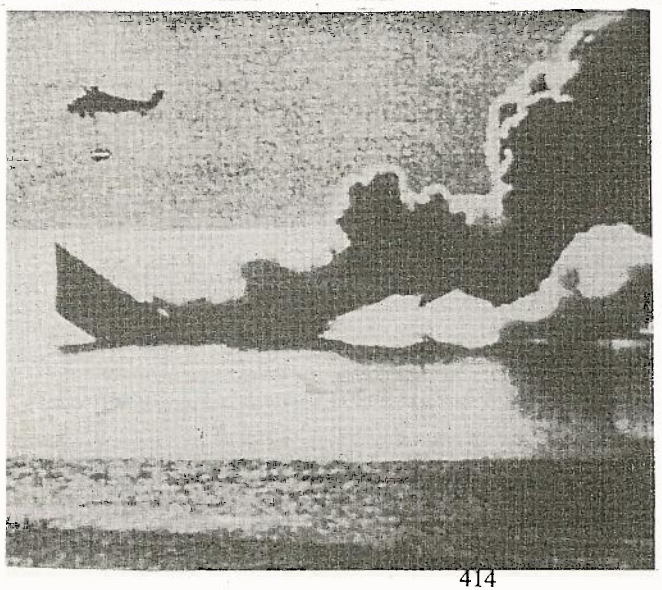
Gráfico Nº 45b

Volando ya sobre GRAN MALVINA y recostado sobre las elevaciones del Norte visualicé a un A-4 y lo identifiqué como propio, al llamarlo por radio me di cuenta que era el Cap. de Corbeta ZUBIZARRETA con quien me reuní para el regreso.

Luego de esto escuchamos al Cap. de Corbeta CASTRO FOX que nos llamaba, estaba bien pero tenía problemas con la transferencia de combustible y con el que le quedaba para poder usar llegaba en emergencia de regreso a nuestra base, por lo que debió cumplir un perfil especial diferente al nuestro.

En el aterrizaje y a raíz de que no pudo lanzar el armamento, falleció el Cap. de Corbeta ZUBIZARRETA al eyectar por salirse de pista. (Gráfico 45a y 45b).





Fragata británica "ANTELOPE" al estallar y posteriormente hundiéndose en el Estrecho de San Carlos.

CAPITULO 46

PRIMERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE HELICOPTEROS

1. RELACION DE LA PLANA MAYOR Y DOTACION

Finalizada la OPERACION ROSARIO, donde el 3-H-110 (TN BUSSON - TC GUERRA - SS GATTI) tuvo una destacada actuación en la recuperación de las ISLAS GEORGIAS, la Escuadrilla desplegó sus helicópteros en Unidades de Superficie y en Bases y Estaciones Aeronavales, dependiendo de los respectivos Comandos.

La Plana Mayor y Dotación fue reforzada con pilotos adscriptos a efectos de poder cumplir con las diversas tareas que se le asignaron.

COMANDANTE DE LA PRIMERA ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE HELICOPTEROS

CC AUGUSTO RIVOLTA

PLANA MAYOR

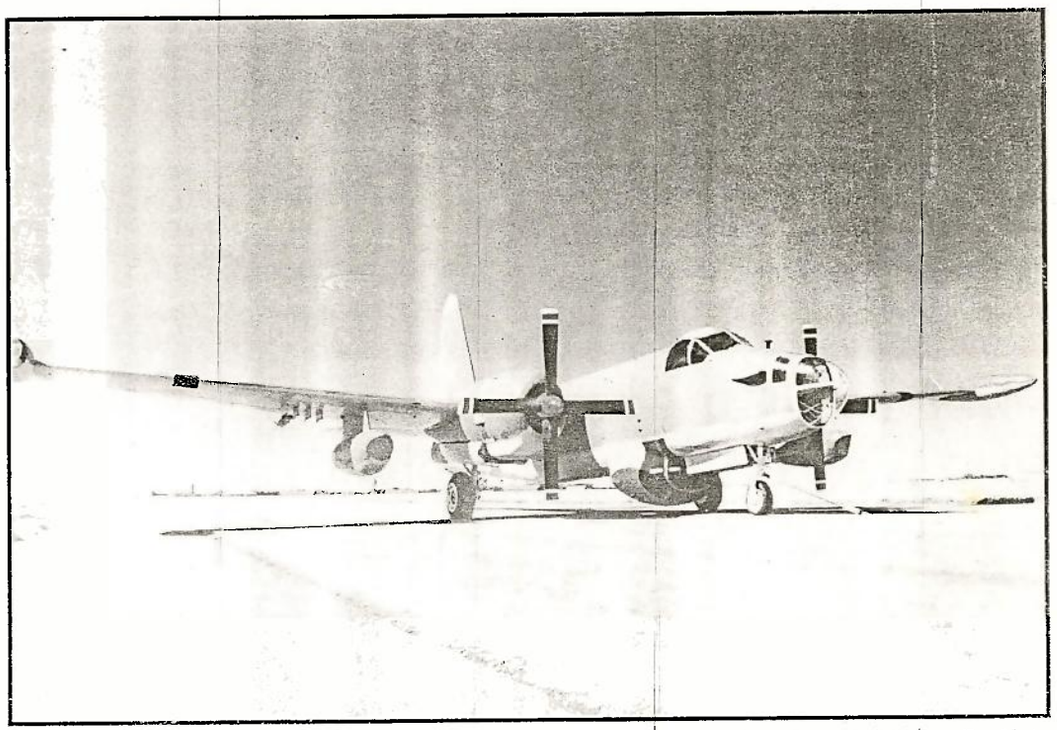
CC Guillermo OTAMENDI
CC Rodolfo F. PERCIACANTO
TN Carlos W. PEREZ
TN Remo Omar BUSSON
TN Marcelo H. MIRANDA
TN Jorge E. RODRIGUEZ
TN Juan A. ALOMAR
TC Miguel FAJRE
TC Pablo G.LOUBET JAMBERT
TC Guillermo GUERRA
TC Mario I CARRANZA HORTELOUP
TC Romeo S. VOLPI
GU Hugo BADESSICH
GU Daniel A.SOLARI
GU Horacio ROSSI
GU Héctor SARTORI
GU Luis SAVOIA
GU Gonzalo SULE
GU Rómulo GUERRINI
GU Carlos MARIN

Lockheed P2V Neptune

SERIE AERONAVAL Nº7

Lockheed P2V Neptune

4/8



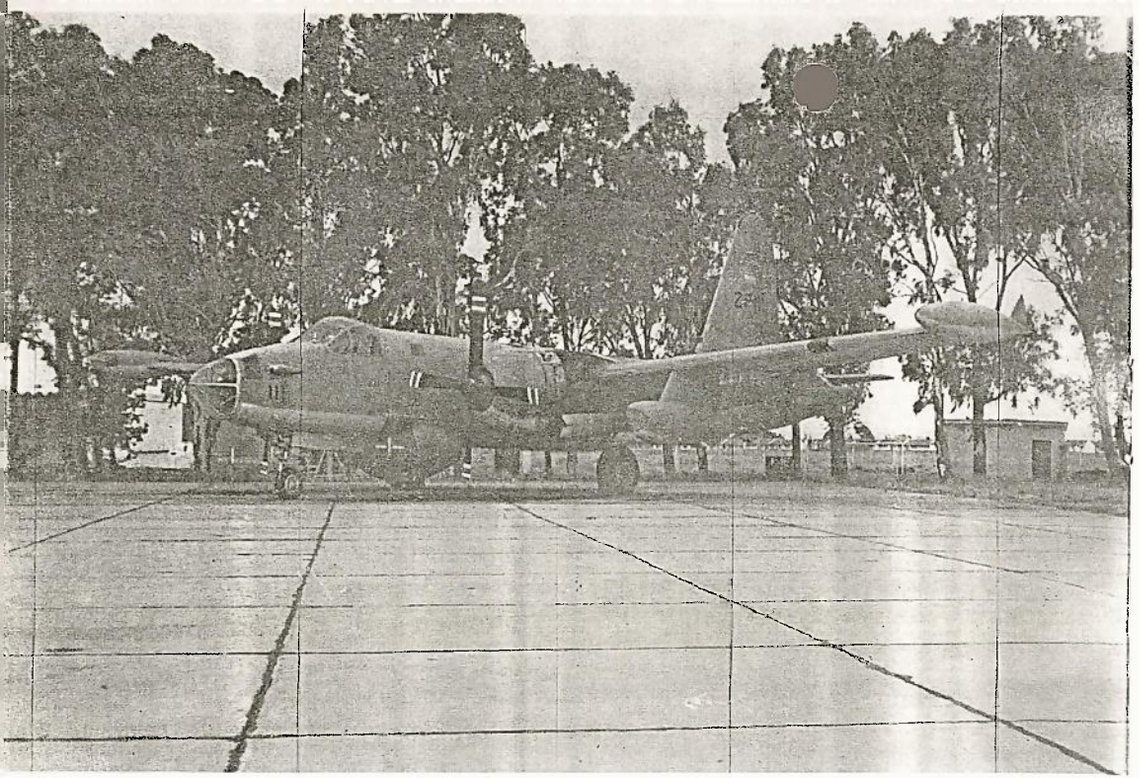
Lockheed SP-2H Neptune 0708/2-P-112, Cdte. Espora 12.12.87 (Foto J. Núñez Padín)

Museo de la Aviación Naval
Instituto Aeronaval

Con todo mi afecto a un "viejo patrullero" el SIAE Jorge A. Núñez

Jorge F. Núñez Padín

ENERO 1994



El Neptune 0707/2-P-111 realizó su último vuelo el 28.07.82, completando 1842 h de servicio en la Aviación Naval (J. Núñez Padín)

CC Sepetich, CC Proni Leston, TF Pernuzzi, SI Del Negro y SI Saavedra (de izq. a der.), fueron parte de la dotación del SP-2H 0708/2-P-112 que descubrió al HMS "Sheffield" el 04.05.82 (J. Núñez Padín)

ciándose las actividades de exploración a partir del 18 de Abril con el 0708/2-P-112. Al día siguiente, y ante el bloqueo naval impuesto por Inglaterra, ambos Neptunes proveyeron escolta antisubmarina al mercante de ELMA "Formosa" que transportaba un importante cargamento de equipo hacia Puerto Argentino. En los días siguientes, además de vuelos de exploración, se realizaron prácticas de guiado de aviones de ataque Super Etendard contra unidades navales a mar abierto. A partir del 1 de Mayo y ante la presunción de que operaban submarinos enemigos, los Neptunes comenzaron a transportar torpedos antisubmarinos Mk.44 en las estaciones alares.

Alrededor de las 17:15 h del 2 de Mayo, el destructor ARA (D-29) "Piedrabuena" informó que el crucero ARA (C-4) "Gral. Belgrano" había desaparecido de la superficie tras un supuesto ataque submarino. Inmediatamente se inició una operación aeronaval de búsqueda y rescate de sobrevivientes. El Neptune 0708/2-P-112 (CC Proni Leston) inició a partir de las 23:30 h una búsqueda nocturna, con mal tiempo que obligó a un vuelo a muy baja altura, que concluyó sin resultados a las 06:30 h del día siguiente. Quince minutos antes despegaba el 0707/2-P-111 (CC Pérez Roca, TN Arbini, TC Andersen, SS Rodríguez, SS Noell, SS Ledezma, SS Olivera, SS Fosarelli, SS Leiva y CI Soria) que ubicaría el lugar del naufragio hacia las 09:20 h. Minutos más tarde se identificó un contacto submarino (posiblemente el HMS "Conqueror"), pero se ordenó continuar la búsqueda de náufragos. A partir de las 09:55 h el Neptune entró en contacto radial con una de las balsas, las cuales fueron avistadas por primera vez a las 13:20 h. La tripulación del SP-2H lanzó marcas de humo en la zona, transmitió la posición exacta y emprendió el regreso hacia Río Grande tras nueve horas de vuelo.

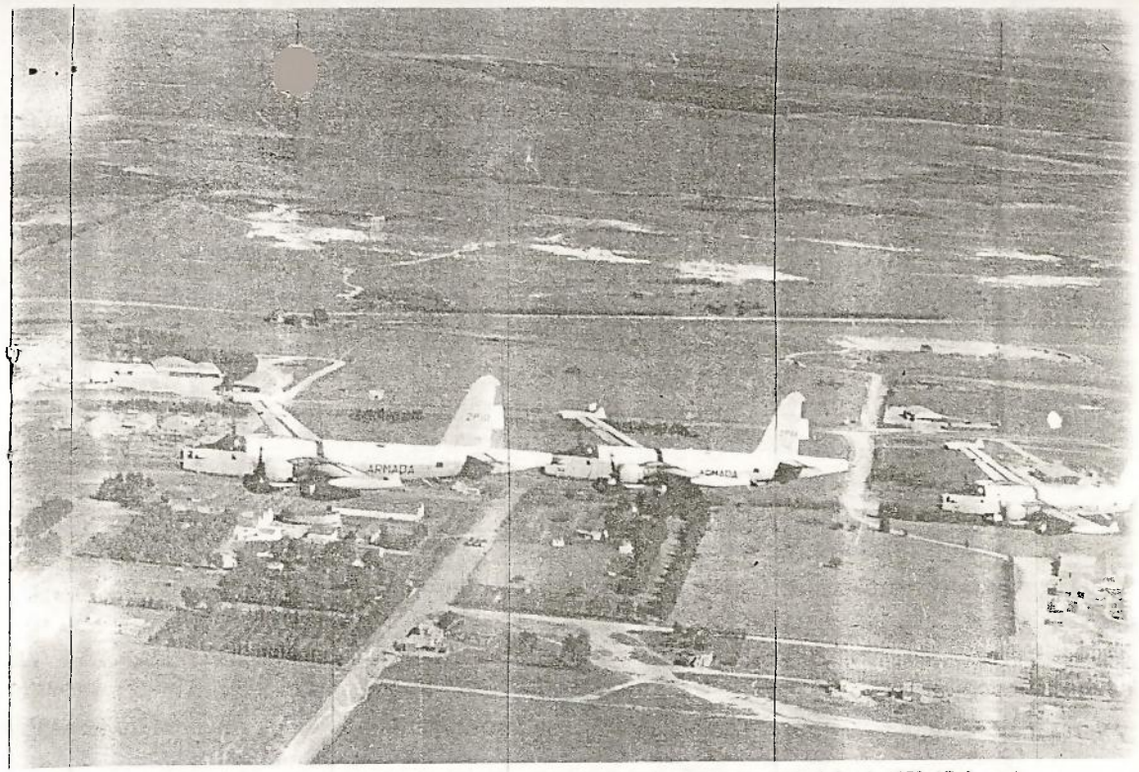
A las 05:07 h del día siguiente el 0708/2-P-112 con 11 tripulantes (CC Proni Leston, CC Sepetich, TF Gatti, TC Meneses, TC Pernuzzi, SI Heredia, SI Sosa, CP Saavedra, CP Yerba, CP Del Negro, CP Núñez y CI Fernandez) inició un vuelo de exploración circundando a las Islas Malvinas, efectuando búsqueda ESM y con radar. Sobre la posición 53°4' Lat.S 58°1' Long. O se detectó la presencia de unidades de superficie a las 07:10 h, identificando el receptor AN/ALR-8 las emisiones en banda D de un radar Type 965 perteneciente a una nave británica. Informada la novedad, el Comando de Aviación Naval, ordenó el alistamiento de una sección de ataque con Super Etendards y al comandante del Neptune mantener el contacto con la formación naval enemiga. Para evitar su identificación y seguimiento, el SP-2H volaba a baja altura, ascendiendo hasta los 3500 pies el tiempo mínimo para efectuar el barrido radar. Aproximadamente a las 09:25 h el radar de exploración AN/APS-20 quedó inoperativo, lo que obligó a una complicada maniobra de reparación, calibración y testeo en vuelo que insumió una hora de trabajo. Finalmente y con el último barrido del radar (que quedaría nuevamente sin servicio) el Neptune determinó que en la posición 52°33' Lat. S - 57°40.5' Long. O, se encontraban tres naves de

superficie, hacia la cual fueron guiados los Super Etendard. El resultado de esta acción, fue el hundimiento a 70 millas al SE de Puerto Argentino del HMS (D-80) "Sheffield" lo que causó un fuerte impacto entre las filas de la Royal Navy.

Una vez concretado el ataque, a las 12:37 h partió el 0707/2 P-111 (CC Pérez Roca) con el objeto de obtener información sobre la situación de la formación naval enemiga. Durante el vuelo y a causa de desperfectos en sus sensores, el Neptune se ubicó a tan sólo 40 millas de una nave inglesa, la cual transmitió a las 15:52 h su posición a una patrulla de Sea Harriers. Esta comunicación fue interceptada en Río Grande, ordenándose el retorno inmediato a máxima velocidad y en completo silencio, al tiempo que una sección de Dagger de la Fuerza Aérea despegaba hacia las 16:06 h en una mision de diversión. De esta forma, el Neptune escapó de una segura destrucción, aterrizando novedad a las 17:05 h. Posteriormente la actividad de los Neptune, estuvo limitada por fallas principalmente en sus equipos electrónicos. Entre el 5 al 12 de Mayo, sólo se cumplieron 4 vuelos de exploración antisuperficie. El 13 de Mayo fue replegado a Cdte. Espora al Neptune 0707/2-P-111 y dos días más tarde lo hizo el 0708/2-P-112. Se planteó la posibilidad de ejecutar misiones de minado naval sobre la boca del Estrecho de San Carlos. Aunque se efectuó adiestramiento en vuelo con el 0707/2-P-111 los días 5 y 7 de Junio, estas misiones no se llevaron a la práctica. La Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Exploración, fue condecorada con la medalla "Honor al Valor en Combate", por "ejecutar operaciones de exploración con inferioridad de medios en prolongados contactos con el enemigo, bajo condiciones límite de distancia y meteorología proveyendo valiosa información y guiando operaciones de ataque".

3 LOCKHEED P2V NEPTUNE TECNICA

Del Lockheed Model 526 (BuAer 124865) que realizó su vuelo inaugural el 29 de Diciembre de 1950, se construirían 424 ejemplares bajo la designación P2V-5 (P-2E). De este total, 52 aviones fueron incorporados entre 1952 y 1953 a la Royal Air Force como Neptune MR Mk.I. Se trataba de un bimotor de ala media, diseñado para exploración antisubmarina, ataque todo tiempo, minado y torpedeo. La planta de poder la constituían 2 motores radiales Wright Cyclone R-3350-30W de 3250 hp y que alcanzaban los 3500 hp mediante inyección de agua-metanol. El sistema de combustible (de 115/145 octanos) estaba compuesto por 4 tanques alares autoobturables de 2650 l c.u., 2 en las puntas de ala de 1325 l c.u.y otros 2 de igual capacidad en la bodega de bombas. El sistema electrónico era sumamente completo para su época, e incluía dos radares de exploración: el AN/APS-20AC en el carenado ventral (de 1 MW de potencia max., en banda E) y el AN/APS-31 (banda I) en la sección frontal del tanque de punta de ala derecho. Por encima del APS-31 estaba ubicado



Formación de SP-2H (compuesta por el 2-P-111, 112 y 114) sobre la ría de Bahía Blanca a principios de 1978. (G. Lucas)

Instalación de los reactores auxiliares, limitó a cuatro el número de soportes alares, tal como se observa en la foto. En la misma, el 2-P-112 en el Aeropuerto de Río Grande durante maniobras aeronavales durante Marzo de 1978. (EscAerExpl)

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GUERRA AEREA SUDATLANTICA

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de fragata Jorge Colombo condujo un par de Super Etendard de la Segunda Escuadrilla desde Río Grande con la intención de cumplir el primer ataque con Exocet. El primer reaprovisionamiento de combustible en vuelo, frente a la costa, fracasó, y los aviones retornaron con los preciosos misiles todavía en sus lanzadores.

Entretanto, el crucero *General Belgrano* y los dos destructores continuaban su patrulla entre la isla de los Estados y el banco Burdwood, ahora volviendo hacia la primera. El submarino nucelar británico *Conqueror* los seguía. Luego de un intercambio de mensajes vía satélite con el comando de la flota de la Armada Real en Northwood, en las afueras de Londres, el comandante del submarino recibió órdenes de atacar al crucero a pesar que se encontraba 30 millas fuera de la zona de exclusión total. El *Conqueror* lanzó una salva de torpedos contra el *General Belgrano*, dos de los cuales hicieron impacto y le infligieron gran daño. Dos horas después, el crucero se hundió, y pese a las prolongadas operaciones de rescate cumplidas por la Armada Argentina, se perdieron trescientos veintiún tripulantes.

Tanto durante como después del conflicto hubo muchas controversias en torno al ataque al *General Belgrano* mientras se encotraba fuera de la zona de exclusión total y rumbo hacia el continente, al igual que el otro grupo de barcos argentinos. Sin embargo, las fuentes oficiales argentinas no hicieron mención a que se hubiese ordenado a los buques volver a puerto, en una retirada que de todos modos era temporaria: el *25 de Mayo* y sus escoltas pondrían de nuevo proa hacia el este cuando las condiciones meteorológicas favorecieran el lanzamiento del ataque aéreo; en cuanto al *General Belgrano*, estaba simplemente en su pierna hacia el oeste en su línea de patrulla. No hay duda de que si la meteorología lo hubiese permitido, el *25 de Mayo* hubiera lanzado su ataque contra los buques británicos desde fuera de la zona de exclusión total, y si los Skyhawk o Super Etendard hubieran tocado a uno o ambos de los portaviones británicos, el *General Belgrano* estaba en posición de participar en la acción de superficie contra el remanente de la Fuerza de Tareas.

Luego de la pérdida del *General Belgrano*, la Flota de Mar argentina retornó de inmediato a las aguas cercanas al continente, donde permanecería durante el resto del conflicto. Los submarinos nuclares británicos mantendrían un bloqueo de las bases navales, aunque la posibilidad de una súbita salida argentina a toda marcha hacia alta mar preocuparía a los planificadores británicos durante las semanas siguientes.

3 DE MAYO

En la noche del 2 de mayo el aviso *Alférez Sobral* reanudó la búsqueda de los dos tripulantes del Canberra abatido en el mar al norte de las Malvinas. Poco después de medianoche, el capitán de corbeta John Chandler, que volaba en un Sea King del Escuadrón N° 826, se acercó a un pequeño contacto de superficie detectado con el radar. El navío tenía hasta entonces las luces encendidas, pero cuando se acercó el helicóptero, las apagó. Cuando el helicóptero se aproximó todavía más, abrió fuego con armas automáticas. Chandler se puso a distancia segura sin haber sufrido daños, y pidió refuerzos. Los destructores *Glasgow* y *Coventry* despacharon sus helicópteros Lynx, cada uno equipado con los nuevos y aun no ensayados misiles Sea Skua, enviados apresuradamente a las unidades de primera línea cuando la Fuerza de Tareas avanzaba hacia el sur. El Lynx del *Coventry* fue el primero en la escena, y guiado por el Sea King de Chandler, detectó por radar al barco enemigo, logró engancharlo y se acercó a 8 millas donde lanzó dos Sea Skua en sucesión. Ambos misiles se orientaron hacia el eco radar del *Alférez Sobral*, causando daños en su superestructura. El Lynx del *Glasgow* arribó a escena poco después, y cuando se acercó, el desafiante aviso volvió a abrir fuego. El Lynx se alejó un poco, y lanzó dos Sea Skua que partieron en trayectoria rasante hacia la nave, donde impactaron y detonaron. Dos días después, el *Alférez Sobral*, con casi todo su puente volado y su comandante y siete tripulantes muertos, llegaría a Puerto Deseado, en el continente. Ninguno de los tripulantes del Canberra derribado fue rescatado.

4 DE MAYO

Al caer la tarde del 3 de mayo, once aviones tanque Víctor y dos Vulcan despegaron de Ascensión para lanzar el segundo ataque "Black Buck" contra el aeródromo de Puerto Argentino. Las lecciones del primer ataque estaban bien aprendidas, y se habían introducido modificaciones en los procedimientos de reaprovisionamiento de combustible. "En Black Buck 1 había una gran formación en marcha al sur, que poco a poco se fue reduciendo. En nuestra misión hubo dos formaciones más pequeñas", explicó el mayor John Reeve, del Escuadrón N° 50, comandante del Vulcan. "La primera comprendía a nuestro Vulcan y a sus aprovisionadores, los cuales debían acompañarnos en dos tercios del camino hasta Puer-

to Argentino antes que el último retornara. La segunda ola de tanques despegó unos cinco minutos después que nosotros, y volaron a velocidad y altura ligeramente mayores que las nuestras, de manera que mucho más allá nos alcanzaron. Su tarea consistía en aprovisionar al máximo a un solo Víctor para que éste llenara nuestros tanques inmediatamente antes que comenzáramos a descender hacia el blanco. Todo anduvo perfectamente bien".

En realidad, la misión entera se desarrolló sin dificultades excepto en el blanco, donde la suerte que acompañó a Martin Withers en la primera misión abandonó a los miembros de la segunda en un momento crítico. El reguero de veintiún bombas de mil libras del Vulcan de Reeve erró por muy poco a la cabecera oeste de la pista sin causar daños adicionales al aeródromo. Todos los aviones participantes en la operación regresaron sin novedades a Ascensión.

Hasta este punto, las pérdidas mayores del conflicto correspondían al lado argentino. Pero ahora, la fortuna que acompañaba a los británicos terminaría súbitamente. Aquella mañana, el capitán de corbeta Gordon Batt encabezaba un segundo ataque contra Goose Green con tres Sea Harrier del Escuadrón N° 800. El mismo y el teniente de navío Nick Taylor atacarían con bombas-racimo a los Pucará estacionados, irrumpiendo desde el sudeste; una vez que hubieran pasado sobre el blanco, el capitán Ted Ball ingresaría desde el sudoeste y descargaría tres bombas de mil libras retardadas con paracaídas para producir cráteres en la franja de aterrizaje. "Giré hacia el blanco buscando a Nick, pues él tendría que estar claro antes que yo lanzara mis bombas. Lo vi entrando exactamente donde esperaba verlo", recordó Ball. Entonces el avión de Taylor fue alcanzado por fuego de grueso calibre desde tierra, casi con certeza Oerlikon de 35 mm. "Repentinamente su Sea Harrier ardió en llamas; continuó volando un trecho y se estrelló en tierra en una gran bola de fuego. Probablemente estaba muerto antes de llegar al suelo, porque hubiera tenido tiempo de eyectarse. Al principio quedé perplejo ante la escena, pero tuve que continuar con la tarea de lanzar mis bombas y evadirme de la zona".

La pérdida del piloto del Sea Harrier conmovió a toda la Fuerza de Tareas, pero cosas peores sucederían muy pronto. Esa mañana desde muy temprano, un avión patrullero Neptune de la Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Exploración mantenía contacto con los buques británicos, e informó que la concentración principal estaba 100 millas al sur de Puerto Argentino. Una vez más, el Comando de la Aviación Naval Argentina ordenó un ataque de Super Etendard, y a 09.45 horas el capitán de corbeta Augusto Bedacarratz y el teniente de navío Armando Mayora despegaron de Río Grande. Cada aeronave llevaba tanques de combustible externos bajo el ala de babor y del fuselaje, y un solo Exocet bajo el ala de estribor. Quince minutos después del despegue, los aviones de ataque llenaron sus tanques al tope mediante el combustible provisto por un Hércules KC-130, y continuaron hacia el este a media altura antes de aproximarse al área del blanco, donde descendieron hasta quince metros sobre las olas. Durante esta fase los dos aviones mantuvieron contacto visual entre ellos y guardaron estricto silencio de radio y radar, orientándose los pilotos por las infrecuentes difusiones del Neptune actualizando la posición del blanco. Al llegar a la zona donde se presumía estaban los buques, ambos aviones ascendieron hasta 120 pies, encendieron brevemente sus radares para localizar las posiciones exactas de los blancos enfrentados, dispararon sus Exocet y se retiraron a gran velocidad. Era una muestra de lo impersonal de la guerra moderna: ningún piloto tenía idea de cuál sería el buque al que había apuntado su misil.

Eran poco después de las once cuando el destructor HMS *Sheffield*, en funciones de piquete radar unas 20 millas al oeste del cuerpo principal del Grupo de Tareas británicas, tuvo un contacto radar sobre un avión acercándose a baja altura desde el oeste; el contacto desapareció de la enseguida de la pantalla radar.

El primer indicio positivo de peligro en ciernes se registró dos minutos después, cuando los tenientes de navío Peter Walpole y Brian Layshon vieron desde el puente del *Sheffield*, hacia la amura de estribor, una estela de humo próxima al agua y el misil a una milla y acercándose velozmente. Cinco segundos después el Exocet golpeaba en el medio al destructor y se abría paso dentro del casco con lo que su comandante, capitán de navío Sam Salt, describió como "un breve, claro y poco impresionante 'bang' ". Desde el episodio se ha discutido si la cabeza de combate de 364 libras del misil detonó completamente; los autores, tras examinar las evidencias disponibles, lo consideran poco probable. Un misil de media tonelada que hiciera impacto a mil kilómetros por hora y se frenara sin explotar después de atravesar diez metros de la estructura de un barco provocaría considerables daños, y es casi seguro que habría suficiente combustible en el cohete impulsor como para desencadenar un incendio intenso en la zona donde se detuviera. En ese momento la tripulación del *Sheffield* estaba en sus puestos normales de guardia y no en las estaciones de combate, y la mayoría de los veintiún hombres muertos estaban en el sollado o en el cuarto de computación cercano cuando golpeó el Exocet.

Casi de inmediato los equipos de control de daños del buque comenzaron la tarea de contener el fuego, pero la tubería principal de incendio estaba fracturada como consecuencia del impacto inicial, y los trabajos se hicieron aún más difíciles a causa del humo

ácido y asfixiante desprendido de la envoltura de los cables al quemarse, el cual se extendió rápidamente por todo el barco e hizo casi imposible sobrevivir en las cubiertas inferiores sin aparatos respiradores.

El itinerario seguido por el segundo Exocet lanzado es menos claro, pero existe evidencia de que pasó cerca de la fragata *Yarmouth* antes de caer inofensivamente al mar.

Los primeros en llegar al buque averiado fueron el teniente de corbeta Phil Dibb y su tripulación en un Sea King del Escuadrón N° 826 que cumplía patrulla antisubmarina en la zona. Súbitamente Dibb había divisado a un destructor frente a él que largaba humo del casco. "Dije a mi observador: '¿Qué buque es ése a la una en punto y a 7 millas, que echa tanto humo? ¿Es el *Sheffield* o el *Coventry*? Dijo: 'Ah, esos tipo 42 largan mucho humo'. 'No tanto como éste', agregué. Nos acercamos y descubrimos que estaba a la deriva y que una humareda negra le brotaba del medio. No obteníamos respuesta a nuestros llamados radiales, pues el misil había deshecho sus equipos. Descendimos a uno de nuestros tripulantes sobre el castillo, donde se veían marineros temblorosos y heridos, algunos con quemaduras". El tripulante volvió con detalles sobre la situación y de la asistencia que se requería, y Dibb elevó su helicóptero unos doscientos pies y transmitió las noticias al HMS *Hermes*. Así se conoció en el buque insignia el ataque y sus consecuencias.

A partir de ese momento, una corriente de helicópteros unió al *Sheffield* con los demás navíos, que enviaban sus grupos y equipos de lucha contra el fuego y regresaban con tripulantes heridos. La lucha por salvar el barco prosiguió durante las siguientes cuatro horas, pero era una batalla perdida. Por fin, cuando las llamas ganaron terreno y se acercaban a las santabárbaras, el capitán Salt pidió que se rescatara a los tripulantes que seguían abordo y se dejó el barco en poder del fuego.

Lo inusual del volumen y naturaleza del tráfico radial que registraba la estación argentina de escucha en Puerto Argentino puso de manifiesto que por lo menos uno de los Exocet había dado en el blanco, aunque no estaba claro cual o cuales de los buques habían sido víctimas.

Si la tripulación del *Sheffield* hubiese detectado a tiempo la verdadera naturaleza del ataque, su defensa habría consistido en disparar cohetes de *chaff* en una disposición cuidadosamente diseñada. Durante sus trayectorias los cohetes habrían dispersado millones de agujas de fibra de vidrio metalizada, cada una más delgada que un cabello humano, que producirían muchos blancos de atracción para engañar al misil desviando así su curso. En teoría, el destructor debió haber contado con unos veinticinco segundos de

alerta antes que llegara el Exocet, desde que su cabeza radar comenzó a transmitir en las últimas 5 millas de su vuelo. Según algunos relatos, estas señales vitales fueron perdidas porque en ese instante el *Sheffield* se encontraba transmitiendo con su poderoso equipo de comunicación vía satélite. Cuando Walpole y Layshon vieron al misil desde el puente del destructor, pocos segundos antes del impacto, ya era demasiado tarde para adoptar alguna contramedida. La dura lección que significó la pérdida del *Sheffield* sería aprovechada por la Fuerza de Tareas durante las semanas siguientes.

Tres horas después que el último tripulante del *Sheffield* fuera rescatado, a las 18.15 horas, la British Boardcasting Corporation comunicó el hecho:

> "En el curso de sus tareas dentro de la zona de exclusión total en torno a las islas Falkland, el destructor tipo 42 HMS *Sheffield* fue atacado y alcanzado esta tarde por un misil argentino. En el barco se inició un incendio que se extendió fuera de control. Cuando no hubo más esperanzas de salvar la nave, su dotación la abandonó. Todos los que la abandonaron han sido rescatados".

Para la escuadrilla de Super Etendard de Jorge Colombo en Río Grande, donde los hombres habían esperado ansiosamente toda la tarde, el comunicado de Londres fue la primera indicación de que el *Sheffield* había sido su víctima. Nunca se sabrá con certeza cuál de los misiles fue el que hizo impacto en el destructor. En algunas publicaciones se ha sugerido con frecuencia que el ataque al destructor fue una represalia por el hundimiento del *General Belgrano* dos días antes, con la implicación de que ambos episodios están íntimamente relacionados. Sabemos ahora que la Segunda Escuadrilla había intentado atacar con Exocet a los barcos británicos el 2 de mayo, antes que el *Belgrano* fuera hundido, y que no cumplió su intento únicamente por una falla del reaprovisionamiento en vuelo. Si las condiciones de operabilidad hubiesen sido favorables, es casi seguro que el ataque del Super Etendard del 4 de mayo se hubiese producido independientemente de que alguna nave argentina importante fuera tocada.

Después de la pérdida del *Sheffield*, el Grupo de Tareas británico se retiró bien al este de las Malvinas, para reconsiderar sus operaciones a la luz de la nueva situación. Nunca más durante el conflicto los portaviones volvieron a aproximarse tanto a las islas, y cuando los Sea Harrier operaban allí, se veían forzados a recorrer distancias próximas al máximo radio de acción del avión.

La pérdida del Sea Harrier en Goose Green también determinó cambios en las operaciones de la Fuerza de Tareas. No se volvería a

arriesgar a esos preciosos aviones en misiones de ataque a baja altura sobre objetivos bien defendidos. De allí en más, cuando fuera necesario atacar objetivos terrestres, los Sea Harriers bombardearían desde gran altura o sobre el hombro, métodos menos riesgosos aunque también mucho menos precisos.

5 DE MAYO

Luego de la retirada de los buques de superficie de la Fuerza de Tareas de la Armada Real hacia el este, el tiempo se cerró y hubo un período de poca actividad aérea, salvo los reconocimientos normales y las patrullas de defensa aérea.

Sin embargo, frente a la costa argentina, se desarrollaba una cacería antisubmarina en gran escala después que un avión Tracker de la Escuadrilla Aeronaval Antisubmarina proveniente del *25 de Mayo* informó contacto sobre un posible submarino 80 millas al noreste de Comodoro Rivadavia. Un Sea King de la Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Helicópteros, también con base en el portaviones, se unió en la caza y comunicó un contacto sonar al cual atacó con torpedos buscadores. No se observaron resultados.

Poco después de este incidente, el *25 de Mayo* desembarcó sus aeronaves y retornó a Bahía Blanca. No volvería a participar en el conflicto.

Hubo por entonces una extraña secuela del ataque de los Sea Harrier contra Goose Green el 1° de mayo, cuando el teniente Antonio Jukic murió mientras su Pucará, próximo al despegue, recibió el impacto de bombas-racimo. El gobierno argentino decidió elevar al infortunado piloto al rango de héroe de guerra. El cuento fue elaborado como si hubiese perdido la vida en un solitario ataque contra la flota británica, e inmediatamente después de arrojar sus bombas sobre el portaviones *Hermes* y suscitar un grave incendio, su avión habría sido abatido por un misil guiado; la imaginaria escena fue reproducida en láminas dramáticas que se entregaron a los periodistas. Las noticias reales detrás del embuste se conocieron pronto en la Fuerza Aérea Argentina, donde causó considerable resentimiento entre los pilotos de las unidades operacionales.

6 DE MAYO

Continuó el mal tiempo en torno a la Fuerza de Tareas, con la consecuencia de que en aquella mañana se perdieron dos Sea Harrier del *Invincible*. Alrededor de las nueve de la mañana, los dos cazas volaban por separado en patrullas cuando un Sea King de reconocimiento informó un contacto radar muy al sur de los buques.

Ambos Sea Harrier se destacaron para investigar, y no volvió a saberse nada de ellos pese a la intensa búsqueda que se cumplió. Aunque las posibilidades sean de una contra miles, la explicación más aceptable de lo ocurrido es que los dos aviones hayan chocado. No existen evidencias que hubiesen fuerzas argentinas cerca del área, ni hubo informaciones que pudieran relacionarse con la desaparición de los aparatos.

Sumado a la pérdida de un Sea Harrier dos días antes, el episodio dejaba la cantidad de aviones disponibles para defender a la fuerza de Tareas reducida a diecisiete; ya estaban en viaje otros aviones desde Inglaterra, pero demorarían dos semanas en llegar al área de operaciones y llenar los huecos en los grupos aéreos de los portaviones.

7 DE MAYO

Los temporales continuaron el 7 de mayo, mientras el Grupo 1 despachaba uno de sus transportes Hércules C-130 desde Comodoro Rivadavia a Puerto Argentino. El avión aterrizó en la parte no dañada de la pista, descargó suministros y personal especializado, recogió algunos hombres heridos en las acciones anteriores y volvió al continente. Durante el resto del conflicto, la dotación de aviones Hércules, a los cuales pronto se sumarían transportes Electra y Fokker Fellowship de la Armada, cumplirían un promedio de dos misiones por día a las Malvinas, lo cual contribuiría mucho para mantener elevado el ánimo de las tropas argentinas. Los radares instalados en las islas tuvieron un importante papel en el curso de estas operaciones al alertar sobre las patrullas de Sea Harrier, lo cual permitió a las tripulaciones eludir a los cazas británicos y evitar la intercepción.

8 DE MAYO

El tiempo malo y con poca visibilidad continuó con el consiguiente cese de operaciones de Sea Harrier. Durante ese día y los tres anteriores, el Escuadrón N° 800 del *Hermes* voló en total apenas cuatro salidas de Sea Harrier.

9 DE MAYO

El destructor *Coventry* y la fragata *Broadsword* operaron durante el día sobre Puerto Argentino. El capitán de corbeta Gordon Batt y el capitán Dave Morgan del Escuadrón N° 800 despegaron del *Hermes* para efectuar un bombardeo desde gran altura de la

Ataque al Sheffield

ATAQUE AL SHEFFIELD

CARLOS A. GARCIA BOLL

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BOLETIN DEL CENTRO NAVAL 571

El contraalmirante **Carlos Alberto García Boll** ingresó a la Escuela Naval Militar en 1947. Egresó como guardiamarina en diciembre de 1951.Recibió sus alas de aviador naval en diciembre de 1952 y cursó la Escuela de Guerra Naval en 1966.

Comandante de la Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Exploración en 1967 y 1968, jefe de la Base Aeronaval Río Grande en 1969, 1970 y 1971, miembro de la Misión Naval Argentina al Paraguay en 1972 y 1973. Director de la Escuela de Aviación Naval y Comandante de la Escuadra Aeronaval Nº 1 en 1974.

En 1975 realizó el Curso Superior de Estrategia en la Escuela de Guerra Naval y en 1977 fue comandante de la Fuerza Aeronaval Nº 1. Subsecretario de Seguridad Nacional (Presidencia de la Nación - Secretaría de Planeamiento) en 1979.

Ya como contraalmirante en 1980 integró la Comisión de Asesoramiento Legislativo (CAL). Entre 1981 y 1982 fue comandante de la Aviación Naval. Pasó a retiro en diciembre de 1982.

La guerra de Malvinas exigió de la Armada Argentina la participación activa de diez de sus Escuadrillas Aeronavales. Estaban adiestradas para desarrollar operaciones de exploración, ataque, antisubmarinas, logísticas, búsqueda, rescate y de apoyo, y cumplieron eficazmente con esas misiones, superando las múltiples dificultades que las circunstancias les presentaron.

Si bien los aviones navales efectuaron 533 salidas en el área de batalla, hay una misión en particular que rescato como el arquetipo de la operación aérea naval de ataque, iniciada con la detección de un blanco naval a cargo de un avión explorador, el cual mantiene contacto y guía a los aviones de ataque que se encargan de su destrucción: se trató de una operación en la que todos sus actores, materializando muchos años de trabajo y perfeccionamiento de una Institución, desempeñaron su papel con profesionalismo carente de errores. Si bien posteriormente se realizaron otros ataques exitosos muy importantes, ninguno de ellos contó con la conjunción avión explorador-avión de ataque para su concreción.

El resultado fue que el 4 de mayo de 1982, por primera vez en la historia, un avión de ataque, en una operación bélica real, lanzó un misil aire-superficie, que hizo impacto en el costado de un buque de guerra enemigo, El avión era un Super Etendard de la Aviación Naval Argentina; el misil, un Exocet de fabricación francesa; el buque, un destructor tipo 42, llamado *Sheffield*, de la Armada Británica.

Los super Etendard (SUE) arribaron al país a fines de 1981; sus pilotos habían desarrollado en Francia solamente el adiestramiento básico (45 horas de vuelo por piloto), de manera que tenían por delante un largo tiempo (aproximadamente un año) antes de estar en condiciones, con la ayuda y asesoramiento de técnicos franceses, de dominar las formidables posibilidades que esta aeronave posee para la guerra moderna.

El 31 de marzo de 1982 (dos días antes de la recuperación de Malvinas), dispuse que la segunda escuadrilla aeronaval de Caza y Ataque abandonara todas las actividades previstas en su plan de adiestramiento normal y, saltando etapas, se dedicara exclusivamente a la puesta a punto y adiestramiento en el sistema aire-superficie de ataque con misiles Exocet AM 39; les dí treinta días de plazo.

1. Constituyó una sorpresa técnica para los británicos. Sorprender al enemigo es importante en las operaciones, y en este caso fue sorprendido por la disponibilidad del sistema de armas "avión SUE-misil AM-39 Exocet", armado y puesto en condiciones por los marinos argentinos contra todas las previsiones inglesas, y aun francesas.

2. El lanzamiento del misil por un avión de ataque constituyó una sorpresa táctica. Como se dijo, jamás había sido ejecutado con anterioridad.

3. Es probable que haya constituido una sorpresa táctica para el enemigo el trabajo desarrollado por el Neptune explorador, que operó durante tres horas y media a cortas distancias de buques enemigos dotados de elevada capacidad de información defensa antiaérea y contraérea, sin ser detectado.

Para mayor mérito del explorador, debe señalarse que sus equipos electrónicos adolecían de una degradación considerable. Quedó remarcada la necesidad que tiene una Armada moderna de contar con aviación de exploración eficaz, así como la importancia vital del buen uso y funcionamiento de los medios electrónicos y sus contramedidas.

4. Toda la operación que he descripto (exploración-detección-información-mantenimiento del contacto -guiado de los aviones de ataque-ataque escape y regreso a la base) fue una reproducción de las ejercitaciones de los planes de adiestramiento desarrollados por la aviación naval, en coordinación con la Flota de Mar, a lo largo de muchos años y en forma continuada. A despecho de los medios en juego, unos antiguos (Neptune) y otros novísimos (SUE - Exocet - buques ingleses), los procedimientos seguidos (excepto el lanzamiento en sí constituyeron una clásica operación de la aviación naval donde las tripulaciones accionaron en forma destacada avalando la doctrina, técnicas, tácticas y adiestramiento en vigencia.

5. También constituyó una sorpresa táctica para el enemigo el radio de acción de los Super Etendard, que lograron extenderlo reaprovisionándose en vuelo de aviones tanque de la Fuerza Aérea.

6. Debe reiterarse que los Super Etendard actuaron solos, sin escolta de ninguna naturaleza. Y ello es así porque una de las premisas fundamentales en las que se apoya el éxito del ataque es la sorpresa, y ésta se logra con una gran discreción, por lo que es necesario ofrecer el menor blanco radar posible (dos aviones que adoptan vuelo rasante a una distancia considerable del blanco) y mantener el más absoluto silencio electrónico (sin comunicaciones radiotelefónicas y sin emisiones radar).

7. En cuanto al enemigo, fue prácticamente nula su capacidad de defensa antimisil. No tuvo ningún tipo de alerta anticipada que le permitiera intentar una maniobra evasiva o contrarrestar la acción del AM-39.

8. Es también para destacar el efecto psicológico que el ataque con misil produce sobre las dotaciones de los buques en el área de combate, por lo sorpresivo y por las dificultades para evitarlo.

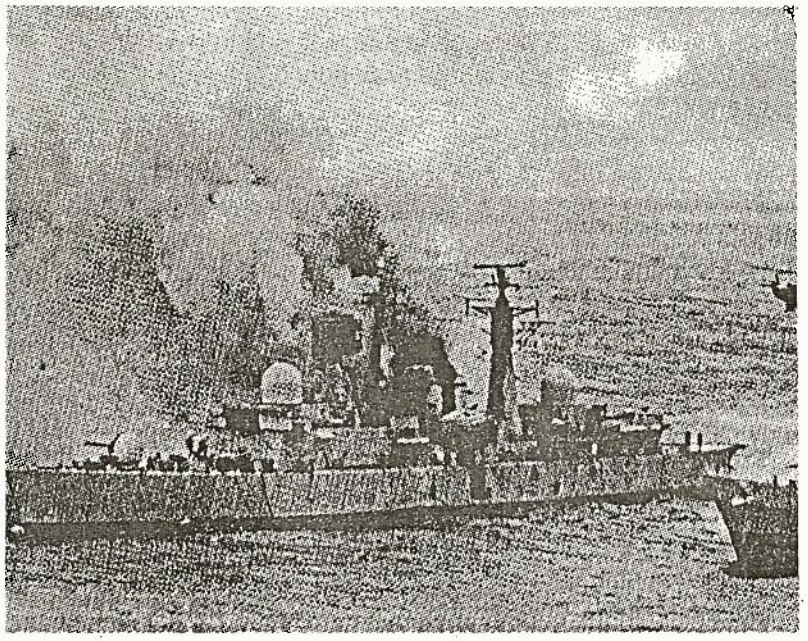
9. El ataque al *Sheffield* alteró sustancialmente el dispositivo naval inglés: los obligó a mantener sus portaaviones mucho más al este, a asignar mayor cantidad de buques para proveerles una cortina antiaérea más efectiva y, en ausencia de aviones de detección aérea temprana (DAT), utilizar helicópteros para tratar de contar con adecuado preaviso.

10. Por último, señalo que este acontecimiento tan novedoso, espectacular, sorpresivo y contundente, no solamente significó un gran éxito de la Armada Argentina sino que llamó la atención de todos los analistas bélicos del mundo, causó honda preocupación en los responsables de las operaciones navales en los distintos teatros conflictivos, y obligó a la revisión de los planeamientos y tácticas de la NATO. ION

lógicas adversas: el techo de nubes a 500 pies y la visibilidad muy reducida por chubascos y bancos de niebla.

A las 1000 el Neptune no pudo informar la posición del enemigo por encontrarse su radar sin servicio: se le ordenó permanecer en la zona y hacer un último intento de reparación y utilización del equipo, y a las 1030 logró, afortunadamente , transmitir a los SUE la situación exacta de los blancos, que ahora eran uno grande y tres medianos. Tras este último esfuerzo, que coronó un trabajo brillante, el explorador inició el regreso a su base en Río Grande, donde aterrizó a las 1304.

Con la nueva posición informada por el Neptune los buques ingleses se encontraban a 115 millas de los SUE, que decidieron atacar el blanco más grande. Para ello incorporaron todos los datos en el sistema de sus unidades de ataque (UAT), y la computadora los condujo al punto en el mar donde,



El Sheffield en llamas, antes de su hundimiento.

después de un primer intento fallido, finalmente localizaron al enemigo en sus radares y lanzaron sendos misiles: se hallaban a unas 25 millas del blanco y eran las 1104. Giraron inmediatamente para alejarse de la zona peligrosa y poner rumbo de regreso a Río Grande, donde aterrizaron sin novedad a las 1204.

Mientras los SUE giraban y los Exocet se desplazaban a dos metros sobre la superficie del mar y a 1000 km/h hacia el sentenciado *Sheffield*, a bordo de éste, según narraciones inglesas, el oficial de guardia vigilaba el horizonte para confirmar si un momentáneo contacto radar que instantes antes habían obtenido en la central de operaciones podía ser un avión atacante. Estaba mirando hacia proa por estribor, acompañado por uno de los pilotos de helicóptero del buque, cuando percibieron a lo lejos una pequeña nube de humo; no acertaron a reconocer de qué se trataba, pero es que ni ellos ni nadie había visto nunca un Exocet de frente a velocidad casi supersónica. Lo indentificaron cuando estaba a una milla de distancia, pero no alcanzaron a adoptar medida alguna, porque cuatro segundos después el misil penetró por la banda de estribor, en el centro del buque, a pocos pies por encima de la línea de flotación, hasta la sala de máquinas, donde hizo explosión con una fuerza devastadora que barrió por delante hasta la central de operaciones y hacia popa hasta la central de control de averías. Los incendios se propagaron rápidamente, y cuatro horas después se ordenó abandonar el buque, que posteriormente se hundió.

Se cerraba un nuevo capítulo en la historia de las guerras en el mar: un avión de la Armada Argentina había hundido un buque enemigo con un misil aire-superficie, un arma totalmente novedosa en operaciones reales, lo que convertía a nuestra aviación naval en pionera de estas modernas técnicas, nunca antes utilizadas por país alguno en el mundo entero.

Muchas conclusiones y enseñanzas se pueden extraer de esta acción de guerra. Veamos:

También por esos días pedí al comandante de la escuadrilla que analizara las posibilidades de operación de los SUE desde la única pista pavimentada de Malvinas: pocas horas después me informó que lo podrían hacer en forma ajustada con condiciones muy favorables, pero no con las características habituales de la zona que humedecían la pista, y se agravaría con vientos cruzados.

Los técnicos franceses que debían venir al país para asesorarnos, suspendieron el viaje por disposición de su gobierno. Nuestros ingenieros, técnicos y el personal de la escuadrilla cumplieron la proeza de hacer el trabajo de aquellos asesores, sin ayuda y sin contar con los elementos necesarios.

Los pilotos, en ritmo frenético, aprovechando al máximo las horas luz y facilidades disponibles, se capacitaron en las complejas maniobras del lanzamiento. Finalmente la escuadrilla estuvo lista en la mitad del plazo que les había impuesto. Con sus cuatro aviones (los repuestos adquiridos también fueron retenidos por el gobierno francés, por lo que fue necesario desguazar el quinto avión) y sus cinco misiles Exocet, se trasladaron el 19 de abril a la Base Aeronaval Río Grande, para adaptarse a la zona y estar listos a entrar en acción. Es conveniente aclarar, por la cantidad de versiones que circularon durante el conflicto, que no se perdió ni averió ningún avión Super Etendard, ni en vuelo ni en tierra, y que los cinco Exocet fueron lanzados contra buques enemigos obteniendo el 100% de efectividad (dos buques hundidos y uno averiado).

Los hechos relacionados con el hundimiento del *Sheffield* ocurrieron de la siguiente manera: el día 4 de mayo desde las 0500 horas, estaba volando un Neptune, como lo hacían todos los días recorriendo el mar alrededor de Malvinas en búsqueda de naves británicas: con ello aseguraban, el paso de aviones argentinos desde el continente hacia las islas y viceversa y, en caso positivo, proveían de blancos a nuestros aviones de ataque.

A las 0709 el explorador detectó en su radar un eco a 90 millas de distancia y 100 millas al Sur de puerto Argentino; con su equipo de contramedidas electrónicas, por el tipo de emisiones recibidas determinó que se trataba de un buque enemigo (también había buques propios y pesqueros de varias nacionalidades en el área), probablemente del tipo destructor 42.

Dispuse que en Río Grande se alistaran dos SUE para atacar con misiles, y que el Neptune se mantuviera en contacto y ampliara su información (en estos casos el explorador sigue una trayectoria errática a muy baja altura, usando su equipo de contramedidas, y periódicamente asciende para encender momentáneamente su radar y confirmar la posición del blanco).

A las 0820 los SUE habían sido verificados y estaban listos a ser tripulados.

A las 0845 el Neptune actualizó la posición del enemigo y confirmó que los blancos eran tres: uno grande y dos medianos.

Ordené que los SUE despegaran a las 0945, y al explorador que informara nuevamente la posición del blanco a las 1000 y se la comunicara a los aviones atacantes (el Neptune estaba teniendo serios problemas con su radar, pero se necesitaba una última posición previa al ataque para ser introducida en la computadora de los SUE).

Los SUE despegaron según lo ordenado. A 150 millas de Río Grande y 15.000 pies de altura se reunieron con el avión tanque (un KC 130 de Fuerza Aérea), completaron sus tanques de combustible e iniciaron la fase final del ataque. los aviones atacantes iban absolutamente solos, sin ningún tipo de escolta.

Cuando descendieron a ras del agua para evitar la detección enemiga, se encontraron con condiciones meteoro-

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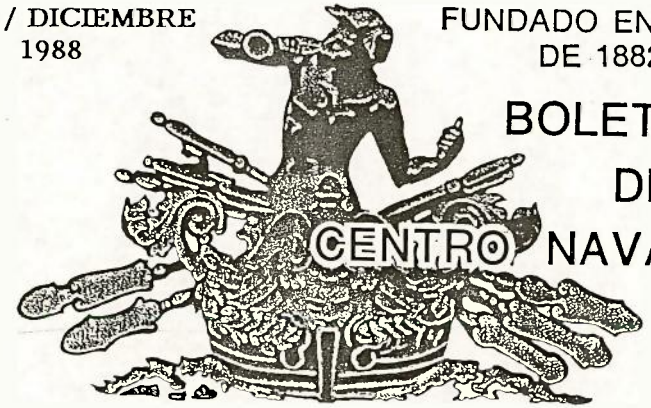

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INDICE

* Cartas del Director 257
* Cartas al Director 259
* Estelas ajenas 272
* *A bordo del USS Independence*, por el teniente de navío **Alberto H. Messidoro** 275

TACTICA Y ESTRATEGIA

* *Armas nucleares*, por el capitán de fragata doctor **Amílcar Funes** 289
* *El pensamiento y el poder en la estrategia operacional*, por el capitán de fragata **Martín F. Villafañe** 307
* *Clausewitz, reflexión sobre su pensamiento*, por el capitán de navío **Jorge L. Colombo** 313

SOCIOLOGIA MILITAR

* *Enseñanza naval, una propuesta metodológica*, por el teniente de navío licenciado **Mario R. Cabrera** 319
* *Espíritu profesional*, por el teniente de navío **Eduardo A. García** 325
* *Neurosis de guerra*, por el doctor **Alfio Puglisi** 329

INTERESES MARITIMOS

* *Mar epicontinental argentino*, por las licenciadas **Rosa G. de Oroz** y **Alicia M. C. de Ferreras** 349

NAUTICA

* *A Ushuaia en catamarán*, por el capitán de navío **Ricardo A. R. Hermelo** 357
* *Sálvese quien quiera*, por el profesor **Mario Pereira** 369
* *La noche del temporal limpio*, por **Alberto Enguix** 377

MALVINAS

* *La Aviación Naval en Malvinas-1982*, por varios autores 385

ARMAMENTO INFORME ANUAL

* *Estado y evolución de los sistemas de armas*, por el capitán de navío **Ventura A. Reverter** 420
* *Glosario de siglas*, nota de la Redacción 447

La Aviación Naval en Malvinas - 1982

LA AVIACION NAVAL EN MALVINAS - 1982

REIMPRESIONES

JORGE LUIS COLOMBO - RODOLFO A. CASTRO FOX - LUIS F. ANSELMI - CARLOS A. MOLTENI - NORBERTO U. PEREIRO

BOLETIN DEL CENTRO NAVAL

385

Continuamos con la reproducción facsimilar de los artículos sobre Malvinas, aparecidos apenas terminadas las hostilidades. Es hoy el turno de los trabajos correspondientes a operaciones de la Aviación Naval.

Los artículos incluidos son los siguientes y el número de página corresponde a la presente entrega:

* N° 733, Octubre-diciembre 1982, **Operaciones de Aviones Navales Super Etendard,** por el capitán de fragata Jorge Luis Colombo, página 386.
* N° 734, Enero-marzo 1983, **La Tercera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque,** por el capitán de corbeta Rodolfo A. Castro Fox, página 391.
* N° 735, Abril-junio 1983, **La Aviación Naval en Malvinas,** por el capitán de navío Luis F. Anselmi, página 394.
* N° 736, Julio-setiembre 1983, **Malvinas... Así lo viví yo,** por el capitán de fragata Carlos A. Molteni, página 404.
* N° 739, Abril-junio 1984, **La Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Sostén Logístico Móvil,** por el capitán de fragata Norberto U. Pereiro, página 413.

Operaciones de Aviones Navales
SUPER ETENDARD

Por el capitán de fragata JORGE LUIS COLOMBO

1. LA PREPARACION DE LA MISION

La escuadrilla se incorpora a la Armada en los últimos meses de 1981, luego de recibir aviones y pilotos de Francia. La experiencia de vuelo en el avión en ese momento era muy reducida (45 horas de vuelo por piloto), habiéndose concretado en el exterior únicamente el adiestramiento básico para aprender a volar el Super Etendard. No se había volado nocturno, ni se había practicado ninguna táctica de vuelo en particular, ni se había recibido por parte de la Armada francesa información alguna de doctrina de ataque para las capacidades del avión. Unicamente se aprendió la técnica de vuelo del nuevo avión.

Durante los meses de diciembre de 1981 y enero, febrero y marzo de 1982, se estaba en proceso de evaluación de la Central Inercial del SUE y de su radar en el modo aire-superficie. Hacia fines del mes de marzo cada piloto había acumulado un total de 80 horas de vuelo aproximadamente y la experiencia individual en el momento de iniciarse las hostilidades era de 100 horas.

El miércoles 31 de marzo se recibe la orden de capacitar la escuadrilla en el menor tiempo posible para utilizar el sistema aire-superficie de ataque, o sea el misil Exocet. En una primera evaluación, se solicitó un mes para la puesta a punto del sistema y para lograr el adiestramiento de los pilotos en una técnica casi nueva, y sin tácticas a la vista.

El día 1° de abril se comenzó la tarea logística de preparar los aviones, probando los sistemas de la UAT (Unidad de Ataque), que comprende el Sistema de Navegación Inercial y el Calculador Digital, además del Sistema Radar AGAVE, Central Aerodinámica, Unidad de Intercambio de Información y Acople, etcétera. Fue necesario además instalar y probar el lanzador del misil en el avión y, lo más importante de todo, colocar la maqueta del misil y asegurarse de que todo funcionara correctamente. En esos momentos se confiaba todavía —principios del mes de abril— en la llegada hacia mediados de mes de la asistencia técnica francesa de la firma Aérospatiale, que por contrato debía venir a la Argentina para asegurar el correcto funcionamiento del sistema Super Etendard-misil Exocet. A los pocos días, con el pesimismo que es de imaginar, se recibió la información de que los franceses no vendrían. Eso significaba que una valiosa información que hacía directamente a la puesta a punto de todo el sistema, no sería recibida. Como consecuencia secundaria y no menos importante, se nos negaba la posibilidad de contar con la inapreciable experiencia y conocimiento del sistema por parte de quienes eran sus diseñadores y fabricantes. De presentarse algún problema que excediera nuestros conocimientos básicos, quedaría librado a nuestra propia capacidad el superarlos.

Es así que el personal de oficiales, suboficiales y cabos de la escuadrilla, junto con ingenieros y técnicos del Arsenal Aeronaval N° 2 de la Base Aeronaval Comandante Espora, enfrentaba un verdadero desafío: asegurar el funcionamiento del avíon Super Etendard y del misil Exocet por su cuenta, sin ayuda exterior. Por si fuera poco, debía lograrse esto en treinta días. Trabajando día y noche, sin descanso, se logró en tan sólo quince días. La capacidad del personal de la escuadrilla, sumada a la de los ingenieros y técnicos, permitió que una tarea que al principio parecía imposible y fuera de nuestras posibilidades se hiciera realidad: se logró el "Top de Tiro" del misil Exocet. En otras palabras, el misil saldría y haría impacto si era lanzado en buenas condiciones.

Si la preparación del misil desde el punto de vista técnico requirió esfuerzo e imaginación, el adiestramiento de los pilotos y la planficación operativa de las misiones a cumplir no fue menor.

La técnica de lanzamiento del misil, si bien complicada, era más o menos conocida. Requería intensificar el adiestramiento en el uso del radar del avión y las técnicas propiamente dichas: el vuelo a más de 500 nudos (cerca de 1.000 km por hora) rozando el agua, el trabajo de a dos sin hablar en absoluto entre los aviones para no delatar la posición y muchas cosas más. Trabajando en la zona de Puerto Belgrano y con todo tipo de buques, mercantes y de guerra, se repitieron estas técnicas de lanzamiento del misil cientos de veces, hasta asegurar un grado mínimo de adiestramiento en una tarea tan compleja.

Pero este era, sin duda, el aspecto menos difícil del adiestramiento. No lo era tanto la determinación de las tácticas a seguir, del estudio de los radios de acción en el límite del alcance del Super Etendard o el perfil de vuelo más adecuado para asegurar la penetración dentro del sistema defensivo inglés sin ser detectados por sus radares o sistemas de contramedidas electrónicas. Debíamos determinar, además, la factibilidad de operar desde Puerto Argentino, efectuando vuelos con pista seca y húmeda simulando la longitud de pista correspondiente a las islas Malvinas en la configuración real de operación, es decir con el misil y los tanques suplementarios de combustible.

Se efectuaron las pruebas de despegue y frenado del avión en la configuración de ataque con misil.

Con pista seca se cumplieron los valores de las curvas de frenado, esto es, se podría operar desde Puerto Argentino para aterrizar. Con muy poco margen de seguridad, pero se podía. Con pista húmeda, no.

El despegue ocurría en el límite, sin márgenes, con la configuración prevista. Conclusión final: no se operaría desde Puerto Argentino, salvo como aeródromo de emergencia por una avería durante el combate. Se imponía, pues, el reabastecimiento en vuelo.

Se necesitaba imperiosamente un perfil de vuelo que asegurara varias cosas: operar a más de 400 millas náuticas de la costa (probablemente cerca de 500, unos 920 kilómetros de distancia) para poder atacar buques ingleses que con toda seguridad no se iban a aproximar en sus operaciones a menos de esa distancia del continente; el perfil debía incluir reabastecimiento en vuelo y, basándose en la premisa fundamental de evadir la detección enemiga, debería incluir la pierna final del ataque,

lar amiento y evasión posteriormente planificadas, de manera tal que volásemos siempre debajo del máximo alcance de detección radar y a la máxima velocidad posible.

Un aspecto que no se pudo evaluar fue la capacidad real de contramedidas electrónicas con que contaban los ingleses, que habían actualizado especialmente a sus buques de primera línea (caso destructor "Sheffield", el primer buque construido de la serie Tipo 42, que para ser modernizado insumió dos años de trabajos intensivos con un presupuesto del orden de los *setenta millones de dólares*). Esta incertidumbre obligaba a no efectuar emisiones electrónicas innecesarias, aceptando solamente la emisión radar con un mínimo número de barridos cuando se estaba dentro del alcance previsto, evitando así la interferencia del radar (bloqueo de pantalla) y con ello el fracaso total de la misión. En concreto, se debía ajustar la planificación y la mecánica de vuelo para poder "entrar" al área de lanzamiento en la forma más discreta posible, permanecer lo mínimo indispensable, lanzar y "salir" aún más rápido que a la ida. Era la única manera de asegurarse una misión profesionalmente ejecutada, preservando los escasos y valiosos medios con que contábamos. Dentro de lo posible, debía contarse además con cierta flexibilidad en la ejecución, para adecuarse a la situación. Así, el éxito estaba asegurado.

Se estudiaron las curvas de los radares de los destructores Tipo 42 de la Armada. Los destructores ARA "Hércules" y "Santísima Trinidad" proporcionaron la información necesaria. Evidentemente, el sistema de defensa antiaérea más efectivo de los ingleses era igual al propio. Se analizaron entonces todas las características del Sea Dart (misil de defensa de área) temible por su alcance, precisión y velocidad.

Una vez determinados los puntos interesantes del perfil de vuelo, se efectuó la práctica con nuestros destructores. Embarcaron pilotos de la escuadrilla a bordo para observar en las mismas pantallas radar y en los sistemas del buque, el resultado de los ataques. Por supuesto, reunidos con el comandante de los buques y sus oficiales, se dieron los prevuelos correspondientes y se efectuaron los análisis posteriores.

Faltaba la práctica de los reabastecimientos en vuelo. Se requirió y obtuvo un KC-130 de la Fuerza Aérea para las prácticas. Estas tendrían lugar a muchas millas de la costa en total silencio electrónico y de su correcta ejecución podría depender luego el éxito de la misión.

Finalmente, se practicó la operación completa. Despegue de Espora, reabastecimiento en vuelo a más de 300 millas náuticas mar adentro, comunicación en vuelo con el avión explorador que dio la posición del enemigo, ataque y escape, con regreso a la base de despegue.

Se habían solicitado treinta días para adiestramiento y poner todo a punto. Habían transcurrido sólo quince días. La escuadrilla estaba lista.

2. LA EJECUCION DE LA MISION

Hasta aquí no había quedado un solo detalle librado al azar. Pero había una cosa que era preocupante: repetir este mismo adiestramiento en la zona de operaciones propiamente dicha. Ese teatro era muy distinto del actual. La meteorología, entre otras cosas, hacía a la diferencia.

El lunes 19 de abril despegaron de Espora hacia Río Grande dos aviones. Al día siguiente dos aviones más. Esos cuatro aviones Super Etendard y cinco misiles Exocet, iban a constituirse en el único capital operativo con que contaría la escuadrilla durante toda la campaña.

El mismo día del arribo a la Base Aeronaval de Río Grande comenzaron los vuelos en la zona. El adiestramiento era básicamente el mismo ejecutado hasta el momento. Lo que cambiaba era el área de operaciones. De inmediato quedó demostrada la necesidad y utilidad de esta etapa previa a las operaciones de guerra. El estado del mar, la altura de las olas y el fuerte viento casi constante, plantearon un trabajo con el radar totalmente distinto y nuevos factores a tener en cuenta. Lo mismo sucedía con la operación desde la Base Aeronaval Río Grande.

El viernes 24 de abril tuvo lugar una reunión con los pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea que volaban operando desde esta base de la Armada con sus aviones Mirage-Dagger. Habían solicitado este prevuelo para que se les relatara cómo se iban a realizar nuestros ataques. Estaban interesados en conocer el desarrollo de los vuelos propios y su planificación. Era la primera vez que se le planteaba el requerimiento de atacar unidades de superficie. Querían saber, por lo tanto, sobre las técnicas propias. Se mostraron particularmente interesados en el análisis sobre las capacidades de los radares del enemigo y la forma de evadir su detección.

Propusieron la posibilidad de una operación conjunta, teniendo en cuenta la capacidad contraaérea de sus aviones utilizados como aviones de escolta de su misil Shafrir aire-aire. Para evaluar tal posibilidad se planificó un vuelo de dos aviones Super Etendard y dos Dagger para el día siguiente. Esta única práctica de una probable escolta aérea nunca llegó a concretarse, porque luego del despegue de los dos aviones Super Etendard, los dos cazas de la Fuerza Aérea que los seguían tuvieron fallas. Uno de ellos no despegó y el otro se volvió a poco de haber despegado por una falla de combustible. A partir de ese momento nunca más se trató la posibilidad de hacer nuestros ataques con escolta proporcionada por aviones de la Fuerza Aérea y de hecho jamás se realizaron. La razón es bien simple: los aviones Super Etendard fundamentaron siempre el éxito de sus ataques en la discreción. Esa discreción significaba la ausencia total de comunicaciones radioeléctricas entre los aviones que ejecutaban los ataques y, más importante todavía, aproximarse al objetivo a gran velocidad, desde muy lejos y a muy baja altura. Las operaciones incluían, además, reabastecimiento en vuelo para efectuar ataques a 500 millas náuticas del continente. Nada de esto era posible con una escolta de aviones de la Fuerza Aérea. Los perfiles de vuelos propios eran sencillamente incompatibles, lo que redundaba en la pérdida total de nuestras dos características operativas más preciadas: la sorpresa y la discreción. Eran al mismo tiempo nuestra mejor defensa, y nos aseguraban la ejecución del ataque sin que el enemigo pudiera lanzar sus aviones o sus misiles para impedir nuestro ataque, o perseguirnos luego. La única operación conjunta efectuada con aviones A-4 de la Fuerza Aérea, exceptuando los reabastecimientos, fue el último ataque, contra el portaaviones "Invincible". No fue una operación ejecutada con escolta, sino que a solicitud de la Fuerza Aérea se agregó a la sección de ataque de aviones Super Etendard cuatro aviones Skyhawk para aumentar la posibilidad de éxito de la operación desde el punto de vista de la cantidad de armamento lanzado únicamente, puesto que se degradaban la

sorpresa y la discreción. Sobre esta operación en particular volveré más adelante en detalle. En honor a la verdad histórica, de todos modos, que quede bien claro: los aviones Super Etendard fueron siempre dos cazadores solitarios.

Se pasarán por alto aquellas misiones que no tuvieron éxito, para relatar únicamente las tres que sí lo tuvieron y que significaron hundimientos o daños comprobados. Los líderes de las misiones y por lo tanto quienes las comandaban fueron siempre jefes de la Aviación Naval, con el grado de capitán de fragata o capitán de corbeta.

2.1. ATAQUE AL DESTRUCTOR "SHEFFIELD"

Fue concretado el martes 4 de mayo de 1982. Iba a ser el único ataque efectuado de acuerdo con las planificaciones iniciales, considerada desde el punto de vista de la Exploración Anti-superficie previa al ataque, para dar una posición inicial del objetivo y su constitución, y teniendo en cuenta también que era deseable que el mismo explorador se mantuviese en contacto luego para actualizar la posición justo antes del ataque.

Con la posición inicial del enemigo a unas 100 millas al sur de Puerto Argentino y a aproximadamente 380 millas de la Base Aeronaval Río Grande, el Comando de la Aviación Naval ordenó el despegue a las 9.45. Despegaron dos aviones con un misil cada uno, para atacar al enemigo en una posición que había sido actualizada a las 9.15 por un avión Neptune explorador de la Armada. A las 10.04 se efectuó la reunión con el avión tanque, y luego de recibir combustible y estando ahora a unas 250 millas del blanco fue comenzada la fase final del ataque.

A las 10.30 de la mañana, y en medio de condiciones meteorológicas realmente malas debido a los chubascos y bancos de nieblas comunes en esta época del año en esas latitudes, lo que hacía disminuir la visibilidad a 1.000 metros y el techo a 500 pies (150 metros) los aviones recibieron la posición actualizada del blanco a atacar por el Neptune explorador. Los blancos se encontraban a 115 millas náuticas de esa posición de los aviones, y eran dos buques medianos y uno grande.

A las 11.04 lanzaron simultáneamente los dos aviones sus dos misiles Exocet. En sus pantallas radar habían tenido los blancos, y efectuando el procedimiento practicado tantas veces antes, habían llegado a lanzar sin ser detectados por el enemigo, en óptimas condiciones y a una distancia que aseguraba con un amplio margen el impacto en el blanco. No habían registrado ningún tipo de interferencia electrónica, lo que indicaba una sorpresa total.

Luego del lanzamiento invirtieron su rumbo y a máxima velocidad y siempre en vuelo rasante, se alejaron sin ser molestados. Otra prueba concluyente de que la discreción tantas veces analizada y obstinadamente buscada había rendido sus frutos. Aterrizaron sin novedad a las 12.10.

Fue una operación eficiente, ejecutada en forma totalmente profesional por profesionales. El binomio avión explorador-avión de ataque demostraba así su contundencia, empleando un medio totalmente nuevo en la guerra en el mar.

La Aviación Naval de la Armada Argentina se convertía así en pionera de estas nuevas técnicas, nunca antes utilizada por país alguno en el mundo entero. El día martes 4 de mayo de 1982, a las 11.04 de la mañana, luchando por una causa noble y en un rincón perdido del Atlántico Sur, la Aviación Naval Argentina abría a los ojos del mundo un nuevo capítulo en la doctrina de las operaciones aeronavales de todas las marinas modernas de Occidente. Que nadie lo dude.

Fue mencionado antes que el ataque al HMS "Sheffield" se convertiría en el único buque atacado según las previsiones iniciales. Esto resultó así porque a mediados del mes de mayo, y antes de poder concretar otro ataque, los aviones Neptune exploradores quedaron sin servicio. Habían volado cientos de horas explorando antes del dos de abril, y continuando su trabajo eficiente y silencioso sin pausas a partir de ese momento, habían llegado al límite de resistencia de su material, especialmente de sus radares y equipos contramedidas electrónicas. La vejez de sus equipos no había soportado un uso tan intensivo, pese a los esfuerzos denodados del comandante de la escuadrilla y de su personal.

Dio así comienzo a un trabajo notable por lo paciente y minucioso, uno de los tantos episodios de esta guerra poco conocido como muchos otros, producto del ingenio desplegado por un grupo de jefes y oficiales de la Armada destacado en la Central de Operaciones en Puerto Argentino. Fue también una consecuencia de la necesidad. Con el correr de los días, esa tarea permitiría concretar los dos últimos ataques de los aviones "Super Etendard".

La imperiosa necesidad de obtener las posiciones en el mar del enemigo, y la ausencia de exploración aérea, llevó a que el almirante a cargo de las operaciones de la Armada en las islas Malvinas diera la orden de hacer el análisis de todos los puntos de aparición en las pantallas radar de los raids de aviones "Sea Harrier" enemigos. Esas posiciones, junto con aquellas que daban lugar a la desaparición del eco en algún lugar del mar, y obtenidas a través del radar instalado en Puerto Argentino, fueron ploteadas minuto a minuto, segundo a segundo, día y noche en forma ininterrumpida. Necesariamente el avión que aparecía en las pantallas radar, aproximándose desde el mar, no podía estar muy lejos del buque desde el cual había despegado. Lo mismo sucedía cuando, luego de haber cumplido el avión "Sea Harrier" su misión, regresaba a su portaaviones.

De esta manera se obtuvieron las posiciones que permitieron los ataques posteriores. Transmitidas al continente, al Comando de la Aviación Naval, fue este Comando de la Armada quien planificó los ataques de los días 25 y 30 de mayo. Estas dos misiones fueron concebidas y planificadas en forma prácticamente similar, donde tenían vital importancia no sólo la posición del blanco, sino la determinación del sector de aproximación más adecuado que permitiera obviar los inconvenientes de la falta de información de superficie, el cual estaba indudablemente condicionado a los perfiles de aproximación calculados para la utilización óptima del avión y su sistema de navegación y ataque. Así los "Super Etendard", sin exploración de superficie, pudieron hundir el "Atlantic Conveyor" y averiar al "Invincible".

2.2. ATAQUE AL PORTACONTENEDORES "ATLANTIC CONVEYOR"

Fue ejecutado el martes 25 de mayo de 1982, fecha muy particular para los argentinos.

El Comando de la Aviación Naval, por una posición recibida desde Puerto Argentino, según lo explicado antes, impartió la orden de atacar a un blanco que se encontraba al nordeste de Puerto Argentino y a 100 millas aproximadamente. Este vuelo, que tuvo un doble reabastecimiento en vuelo, se convirtió en el más largo de todos los efectuados, con una duración de cuatro horas.

La distancia del objetivo desde la Base Aeronaval Río Grande era cercana a las 500 millas. De acuerdo con lo planificado y teniendo en cuenta los parámetros de sector y perfil ya mencionados, se solicitó que el avión tanque fuera ubicado al este de Puerto Deseado y a unas 160 millas. Si bien el camino a recorrer para este ataque era muy largo, permitía pasar a más de 100 millas al norte de las islas Malvinas en su punto más próximo, lo que aseguraba la no detección de los aviones por parte de decenas de buques ingleses que a esta altura de las operaciones se encontraban en las inmediaciones del extremo oriental de las islas.

Los aviones, luego del despegue, efectuaron su reabastecimiento en vuelo sin dificultades. Los dos Super Etendard iniciaron su pierna final de ataque, a más de 270 millas del blanco.

A las 16.32 fueron lanzados dos misiles, uno por cada avión, a una distancia similar a la utilizada en el lanzamiento al "Sheffield", saliendo los dos misiles de la misma forma en óptimas condiciones, luego de tener en la pantalla radar de los aviones, los ecos.

Como en el caso anterior también, no fueron molestados ni antes, ni durante, ni después del lanzamiento. Luego de efectuado, y siempre en vuelo rasante, se dirigieron al aeródromo de Puerto Deseado para aterrizar, ya que la distancia a Río Grande era excesiva.

Pero un encuentro no previsto con el avión tanque, que había permanecido orbitando luego del reabastecimiento en el mismo sitio, permitió reabastecer nuevamente los aviones. Es así como, ya de noche, regresaron a la Base Aeronaval Río Grande.

Quedaba demostrado en la práctica que este procedimiento era exitoso. La posición del objetivo dada por la Armada al Comando de la Aviación Naval fue precisa y permitio concretar un ataque que, ante la ausencia de exploración efectiva, no hubiese sido posible en otras condiciones o de otra manera.

El "Atlantic Conveyor" se hundió, y con él se perdieron pertrechos y repuestos muy importantes para la logística de las operaciones británicas, tal como fuera posteriormente resaltado por un sinnúmero de revistas especializadas inglesas y por el mismo general Jeremy Moore en declaraciones publicadas en diferentes medios de difusión de la Argentina y del exterior.

2.3. ATAQUE AL PORTAAVIONES "INVINCIBLE"

Fue el último ataque, y en su transcurso se lanzó el último misil Exocet que restaba. Se realizó el día domingo 30 de mayo de 1982, y fue conducido por un capitán de corbeta de la Aviación Naval.

De los análisis que efectuaba la Armada en Puerto Argentino surgió una nueva posición para atacar, esta vez al portaaviones "Invincible". Se trataba de atacar un objetivo situado al sudeste de Puerto Argentino, y a unas 100 millas.

El Comando de la Aviación Naval planificó, una vez más, este último ataque, y se dio la orden de atacar ese domingo 30 de mayo.

En esta oportunidad debía tenerse en cuenta la misión realizada sólo cinco días antes, que al penetrar por el NE en forma totalmente imprevista había logrado total sorpresa y que, por sus consecuencias, había evidenciado preocupación de la Fuerza Naval inglesa en los días posteriores, de defenderse de un evidente ataque al "Invincible" desde dicho sector con el único misil que restaba, hecho perfectamente conocido por ellos.

Esto implicaba la planificación de un ataque desde el sector SE, como única posibilidad de lograr la sorpresa que tanto rédito había dado a las operaciones. Esta aproximación era más comprometida desde el punto de vista del radio de acción, dado que eliminaba la posibilidad de un regreso a un aeródromo más próximo que el de salida, como fue el caso de Puerto Deseado para el ataque al "Atlantic Conveyor". Se planficó entonces con una detallada precisión, la ejecución de un doble reaprovisionamiento en vuelo, siempre en el trayecto de ida, dado que la distancia a recorrer era excepcionalmente larga (aproximadamente 500 millas de alejamiento desde la Base Aeronaval Río Grande).

Cuando el vuelo había sido totalmente planificado, el Comando de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina manifestó su deseo de efectuar la operación en forma conjunta, para lo cual se solicitaba la participación de cuatro aviones A4-C en este ataque. El pedido se fundamentaba en la precisión del sistema de navegación inercial del "Super Etendard" y en su radar, lo que le permitía alcanzar objetivos en aguas abiertas. Esto resultaba imposible para los aviones A4-C de la Fuerza Aérea, y la única forma de alcanzar un blanco en esas condiciones era siguiendo a los aviones "Super Etendard". A todo lo dicho se sumaba, además, la posibilidad de incrementar la cantidad de armamento lanzada. Se corría el riesgo de perder sorpresa y discreción, y por ello al aceptarse se puntualizó la necesidad de que los aviones de la Fuerza Aérea cumplieran el mismo perfil y las mismas restricciones en las emisiones electrónicas que los "Super Etendard" de la Aviación Naval. Así fue cumplido, y los cuatro aviones de la Fuerza Aérea acompañaron en este ataque a los propios, armados con dos bombas de 500 libras (250 kilos) cada una.

Luego de haber despegado los seis aviones se dirigieron a la posición convenida de reabastecimiento, ubicada al sudeste de Isla de los Estados. El reabastecimiento se efectuó sin dificultades, y volando siempre rumbo al este se hizo un segundo acople para completar los tanques de combustible al máximo antes de iniciar el ataque.

A una distancia cercana a las 300 millas del objetivo se inició el ataque. El rumbo final del mismo fue noroeste, de modo que el porta-

aviones inglés fue sorprendido por haber recibido un ataque por un sector que se apartaba en más de 100 grados de su eje de defensa antiaérea, que apuntaba hacia el oeste.

Una vez más el misil fue lanzado desde una distancia que aseguró el impacto y en excelentes condiciones, con eco radar en pantalla, confirmado también por el segundo "Super Etendard" que no lanzó.

Dos aviones A-4 fueron derribados por misiles luego de que se les señalara la posición del blanco y el rumbo para el ataque y la distancia. Los otros dos declararon posteriormente haber seguido en su trayectoria al misil, llegando así al objetivo que ya se encontraba envuelto en una espesa humareda como consecuencia del impacto del misil instantes antes. Luego de haber lanzado sus bombas, los dos aviones A-4 regresaron a Río Grande. Los aviones "Super Etendard" después del lanzamiento del misil, efectuaron el escape y regreso a Río Grande sin novedad.

3. CONCLUSIONES FINALES

Más allá de haber sido la primera Armada en la historia de la guerra moderna en utilizar en forma efectiva un misil aire-superficie lanzado desde un avión, la Aviación Naval Argentina y sus aviones SUE pusieron en evidencia las siguientes capacidades, propias de este Sistema de Armas:

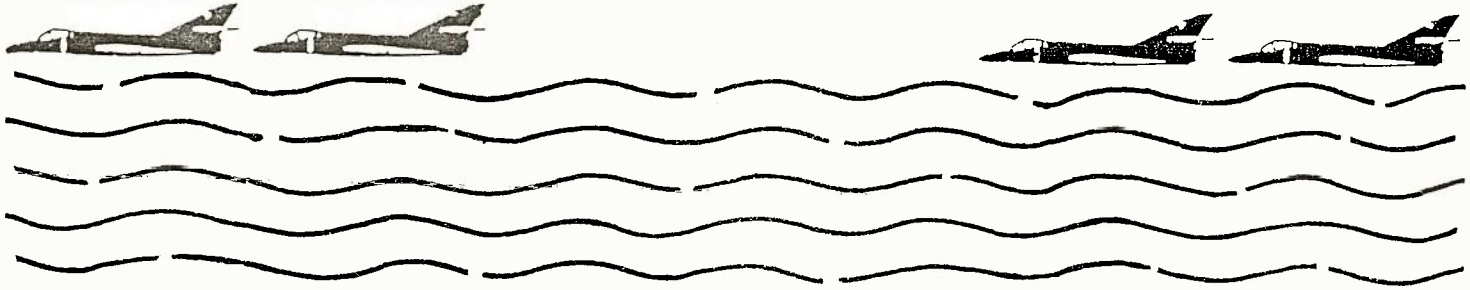
3.1. Efectuar ataques a fuerzas navales en aguas abiertas, constituidas por unidades vitales fuertemente defendidas con excelentes probabilidades de éxito. En rigor de verdad, los aviones "Super Etendard" de la Armada Argentina son los únicos aviones en América latina que pueden realizar exitosamente este tipo de misiones contra una moderna fuerza naval, como es el caso de la británica.

3.2 Los ataques concretados por la Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque con aviones "Super Etendard" produjeron, como consecuencia inmediata y a partir de su dramática entrada en escena hundiendo el "Sheffield", una sustancial modificación en el empleo de las fuerzas navales inglesas. Impusieron de allí en más, y por el solo hecho de la simple amenaza, un tremendo esfuerzo adicional para contrarrestarla, evidenciada en los hechos y por su accionar posterior. La Armada Inglesa se vio obligada a cambiar no sólo su dispositivo de defensa, sino también la ubicación de sus buques en el mar. Con fundamento podemos ahora decir que en lo que hace a la guerra en el mar, el conflicto de Malvinas se dividió en dos etapas: antes y después del primer lanzamiento de un misil Exocet.

Por último, los ingleses sabían perfectamente que restaban sólo tres misiles luego del primer lanzamiento. La inteligente dosificación de esta amenaza latente a lo largo de casi todo el conflicto, y una correcta administración de los medios para emplearlos con profesionalismo únicamente sobre objetivos vitales, permitieron que los resultados obtenidos afectaran significativamente el normal desarrollo de las operaciones británicas en el mar. **HCN**

NOTA: El autor de este artículo se desempeña como Comandante de la Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque, a la cual pertenecen los aviones "Super Etendard".

Ver BOLETIN DEL CENTRO NAVAL N° 752/753, "Cartas al Director", página 7.



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BOLETIN DEL CENTRO NAVAL

FUNDADO EN MAYO DE 1882

Director: Vicealmirante **Rodolfo A. Remotti**.

Consejo Editorial: Presidente, contraalmirante Roque L. Manrique; Vocales, capitán de navío Eduardo L. Alimonda, capitán de fragata Lorenzo O. Lugo, capitán de fragata I.M. Sergio G. Robles.

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* **Proceedings**. Revista del Instituto Naval de los Estados Unidos. Marzo de 1992.

Presenta en este número una amplia gama de artículos ilustrados además con excelentes fotografías a las que nos tiene acostumbrados.
Es posible que al lector le interesen, en particular, algunos de los trabajos tales como: "Latinoamérica, está cambiando también" del que es autor nuestro corresponsal del **Boletín** en los EE.UU. el doctor Robert L. Scheina; "Las armadas del mundo en 1992" escrito por un veterano de esas páginas como es Norman Friedman y los relacionados con el pensamiento de la Armada de Sudáfrica, nuestro vecino "de enfrente" en el Atlántico Sur.
Pero el que sin duda alguna requiere lectura, es el artículo que firma el almirante (RN) Sandy Woodward, referido en detalle al hundimiento del destructor *Sheffield*, durante el conflicto del Atlántico Sur, por la acción de aviones navales argentinos.
En tal sentido y anticipándose a esa expectativa, el **BCN** ha creído conducente incluir en este número la traducción que hizo el capitán de navío Eduardo L. Alimonda, a fin de facilitar su llegada a nuestros lectores.

FUE UN POCO AJUSTADO

Por el almirante **Sandy Woodward**
con **Patrick Robinson**

"Anoche barrieron a mi viejo buque, el *Sheffield*.." decía sencillamente la anotación en su diario. En este extracto de un nuevo libro, *One Hundred Days*, publicado conjuntamente por Harper/Collins de Londres y el Instituto de Publicaciones Navales de los Estados Unidos, captamos un panorama poco común, desde la perspectiva del comandante del grupo de batalla británico, donde describe en forma gráfica y detallada cómo fue hundido el buque durante los primeros días del Conflicto de las Malvinas, en 1982.

Hubo quienes llegaron a describir a la batalla de Gran Bretaña por la recuperación de las Islas Malvinas como "un asunto terriblemente reñido", según exclamara conmovido el Duque de Wellington después de Waterloo. No he de llegar tan lejos, pero tal como el tardío aunque oportuno arribo del ejército de Blucher, también en esta ocasión se presentaron varios puntos críticos de vital importancia. La mayoría de ellos, como tuve el placer de destacar entonces, se volcaron a nuestro favor.

Asimismo, es necesario mencionar que hubo en ese momento varias organizaciones muy competentes que inicialmente apreciaron la operación como destinada al fracaso. Sin ningún orden en particular, ellas fueron las siguientes:

a) La Armada de los Estados Unidos, que consideraba la recuperación de las Islas Malvinas como militarmente imposible.

b) El Ministerio de Defensa de Gran Bretaña, que en general opinaba que todo el plan era demasiado riesgoso.

c) El Ejército Real, que la consideró desacertada porque la relación entre efectivos de fuerzas terrestres no era la adecuada.

d) La Real Fuerza Aérea, que percibió el poco lucido papel que jugaría en vista de las enormes distancias, y supuso que nunca una armada sobreviviría al enfrentamiento con una fuerza aérea.

e) El Secretario de Defensa John Nott, porque el éxito probablemente alteraría las decisiones de defensa de 1981.

Por cierto que tanta gente gritaba "¡Atrás!" como otros clamaban "¡Adelante!". Y muchos de los que primeros se sentaban en sitiales elevados. Pero la principal voz que se escucha gritar "¡Adelante!" fue la del Primer Lord del Mar, almirante sir Henry Leach, quien encabezaba como profesional la Armada Real, y era mi comandante superior.

Indudablemente, un hombre a quien había que escuchar. Si él había manifestado que la armada podía hacerlo, entonces existía total seguridad de ello. Y no precisamente porque fuera lo que la primer ministro Margaret Thatcher y la mayoría del pueblo británico querían oir.

Además, contaba con un sostén muy poderoso del otro lado del Océano Atlántico, en la persona del señor (ahora "sir") Caspar Weinberger, Secretario de Defensa de los Estados Unidos, quien adoptó una firme postura a favor de Gran Bretaña frente a toda clase de oposición local. Weinberger dejó de lado la postura hasta entonces pro-argentina de la administración Reagan, urgiendo al Presidente y al Pentágono a proveer el máximo apoyo al más leal aliado militar de la nación. En su excelente libro, *Fighting for Peace* (Nueva York, Warner Books, 1990), sir Caspar enuncia las claras e íntegras instrucciones impartidas a sus subordinados militares, con respecto a "entregar a Gran Bretaña toda la ayuda posible en cuanto a equipos e inteligencia".

Tenemos motivos para estar muy agradecidos a este buen amigo que ofreciera asistencia en épocas de necesidad; quizás soy quien más le debe. Porque el nuevo misil norteamericano aire-aire Sidewinder fue una de las armas decisivas en los combates sobre la tierra y el mar. Asimismo, si los EE.UU. no nos hubieran facilitado el acceso a la Isla Ascensión, hubiéramos carecido de una base avanzada vital para nuestras fuerzas en el sur.

En términos generales, la victoria británica debiera juzgarse de cualquier modo como un asunto *bastante* reñido, en lo referente a oportunidad, fuerzas terrestres y fuerzas aéreas. Queda además la ineludible realidad de que los comandantes argentinos fracasaron inexplicablemente en comprender que si hubieran tocado al *Hermes*, los británicos estábamos acabados. Nunca persiguieron realmente al único blanco que les hubiera asegurado la victoria.

Sucedió entonces que nos abrimos paso como avanzando sobre el filo de un cuchillo. Quizás yo era quien mejor comprendía que un percance de gravedad, tal como una mina, una explosión o un incendio en cualquiera de nuestros dos portaaviones, casi hubiera bastado para dar por terminada toda la operación. Perdimos al *Sheffield, Coventry, Ardent, Antelope, Atlantic Conveyor,* y *Sir Galahad.* Si a las bombas argentinas se les hubieran colocado espoletas adecuadas para lanzamientos a baja altura, seguramente además hubiéramos perdido al *Antrim, Plymouth, Argonaut, Broadsword,* y *Glasgow.* Y fuimos muy afortunados porque el *Glamorgan* y *Brillant* se hallaban todavía a flote a mediados de junio...

El día en que golpearon al HMS *Shieffield*

Volaban en silencio radial, trepando a 5.000 pies sobre las blancas capas de nubes que ocultaban parcialmente la costa yerma y rocosa que ya dejaban atrás. Simultáneamente retrasaron los aceleradores de los motores a reacción de ambos aviones navales de ataque monoplazas, hasta mantener una velocidad aproximada de 400 nudos para ahorrar combustible. Se mantenían en formación cerrada enfilados directamente hacia el este, con sus radares encendidos pero sin emitir.

Se alejaba rápidamente con el propio avance el último contacto con la patria argentina, el control aéreo de la Base Aeronaval Río Grande, en la legendaria Isla de Tierra del Fuego, al sur del Estrecho de Magallanes. Allí tenía su asiento la Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque, comandada por el capitán de fragata Jorge Colombo.

Ambos pilotos, el capitán de corbeta Augusto Bedacarratz y el teniente de navío Armando Mayora, pertenecían a un selecto grupo de aviadores navales veteranos que cumplirían las misiones de crucial importancia empleando el sistema Super Etendard/Exocet, considerado como la más seria e inmediata amenaza para mis portaaviones. Por entonces, luego de superar una serie de problemas técnicos, ya se hallaban en vuelo, y también en camino...

Eran las diez en punto de la mañana del martes 4 de mayo de 1982. Gran Bretaña libraba una guerra en el Atlántico Sur...

Esa mañana habíamos dispuesto una línea de piquetes compuesta por tres destructores misilísticos del tipo 42, naves más bien pequeñas que desplazaban 4.000 toneladas. Alejado hacia mi derecha, se encontraba la alta y patricia figura del capitán de navío David Hart-Dike, al mando del HMS *Coventry*. Hacia mi izquierda estaba el HMS *Sheffield*, comandado por el capitán de navío Sam Salt, que con poco más de un metro sesenta de estatura era físicamente lo opuesto a Hart-Dike, pero era indudablemente otro experimentado oficial a quien tuve el placer de tratar y respetar durante muchos años. Al centro se encontraba el HMS *Glasgow*, ubicado de modo de asegurar que los tres buques presentaran un amplio frente defensivo mediante sus misiles superficie-aire. El *Glasgow* estaba al comando del capitán de navío Paul Hoddinott, de cuarenta años, ex comandante del submarino de misiles Polaris HMS *Revenge*, hombre poco acostumbrado a cometer errores.

Implícitamente, confiaba en ellos tres. Los conocía personal y profesionalmente, y sabía lo que se hallaba involucrado en tal poco envidiable tarea, después de desempeñarme como comandante del *Sheffield* cinco años antes...

Mis tres comandantes de piquetes no ignoraban los riesgos que corrían. Sabían que si un avión enemigo en acercamiento se elevaba rápidamente y obtenía contacto, lo más probable era que el piloto lanzara sus misiles hacia el primer eco que apareciera en su pantalla de radar. El *Coventry, Glasgow* y *Sheffield* se habían emplazado cuidadosamente, dejándoselos confiados casi exclusivamente en sus sistemas de misiles y autodefensa. La única tranquilidad posible en tal situación se logra repitiéndose contínuamente que el chaff habrá de funcionar según lo previsto; y si así no ocurriera, siempre hay otros dos buques en la misma posición, y puede desearse fervientemente que sea uno de ellos quien reciba el golpe.

Pero Hart-Dike, Hoddinott y Salt sabían que su situación era muy expuesta. Quedaba por comprobarse la efectividad del destructor tipo 42 en esa circunstancia. Permanecer alerta: era todo lo que podían hacer y serles requerido.

A unas 18 millas de los piquetes se hallaba mi segunda línea de defensa: las fragatas *Arrow, Yarmouth* y *Alacrity*, y el grande y viejo destructor *Glamorgan*. Detrás de ellos quedaban los tres buques auxiliares *Olmeda, Resource* y *Fort Austin*, ubicados para aumentar la confusión de los radares enemigos. Solamente a retaguardia de ellos podrían encontrar los Super Etendard a sus blancos apropiados, los portaaviones *Hermes e Invincible*, pero cada uno de ellos contaba con su propio "arquero" en forma de una fragata tipo 22. Muy cerca del *Invincible* estaba el *Brillant,* comandado por el dinámico y voluble capitán de navío John Coward; el *Hermes* tenía al *Broadsword*, con el capitán de navío Bill Canning, un viejo y leal amigo, al comando. Ambos buques de 4.400 toneladas diseñados primordialmente para la guerra antisubmarina, que tenían instalado el notable sistema antimisiles Sea Wolf. Acaba de entrar en servicio, con muy alta reputación. En las pruebas habían logrado impactos sobre las granadas de alta velocidad de 127 mm usadas como blanco. Consistía esencialmente en un sistema de corto alcance, pero con semejante perfomance confiábamos en que el mayor y más lento Exocet le resultaría más fácil aún...

Los dos Super Etendard argentinos se hallaban aproximadamente a 150 millas al oeste de mi fuerza cuando abandoné la central de operaciones del almirante, a bordo del *Hermes*, para ingerir un almuerzo ligero. Bedacarratz y Mayora entraban en ese preciso instante en la masa de aire despejado que nos rodeaba, y no encontraban inconveniente en volar a ras de las olas. Pasaban por encima de ellos los haces de barrido de los radares británicos de larga distancia, que permanecían ciegos a su penetración de alta velocidad.

El radar que poseían los aviones argentinos era de origen francés, como las mismas aeronaves, y lo denominábamos en

código "Handbrake" (freno de mano). Si procedíamos con rapidez podríamos identificarlo y localizarlo. También podríamos ocuparnos de los misiles subsecuentes. Si procedíamos con rapidez...

Ahora son las 13.56 horas. Ambos Super Etendard se elevan a 120 pies sobre el mar. Al nivelar, Bedacarratz echa una mirada hacia abajo, y observa un eco en la pantalla de radar. Su mano enguantada se mueve una cuarta hasta alcanzar el botón de activación del Exocet. Mayora lo imita.

La central de operaciones del *Glasgow*, como las restantes de la fuerza, está repleta de gente que transpira bajo sus capuchas protectores. Son las 13.56 y treinta segundos. Hace calor, y la penumbra parece incrementarlo. El grupo de batalla aún se halla en "Alerta Blanca" cuando el joven marinero Rose da la alarma con palabras que, según dijera más tarde Paul Hoddinott, "me hicieron parar los pelos de la nuca".

"¡Radar Agave!", grita Rose.

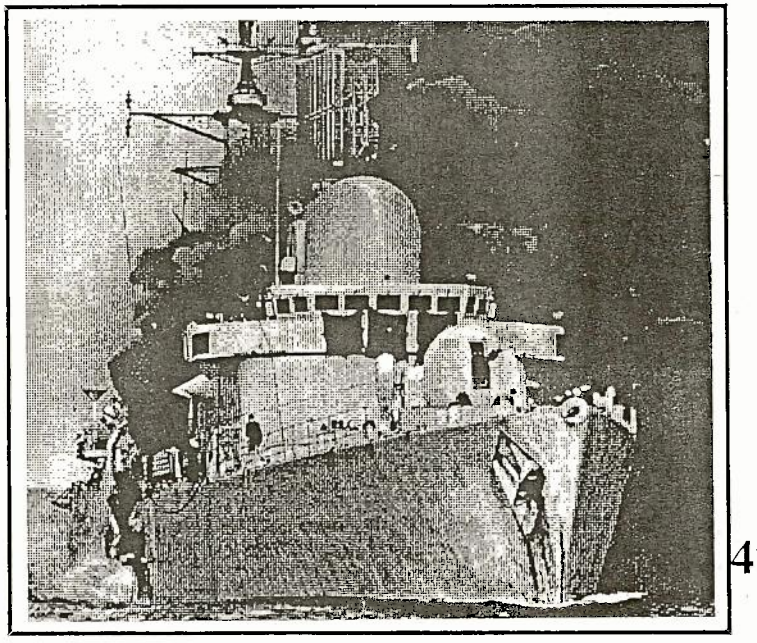
El oficial de guerra aérea (AWO) del *Glasgow*, capitán de corbeta Nick Hawkyard, reacciona de inmediato: "¿Nivel de confianza?".

"¡Cierto!", responde Rose. "Tengo tres barridos, seguidos por un enganche corto. Marcación... dos-tres-ocho. Modo de búsqueda".

Hoddinott da la vuelta para concentrar su vista en la gran consola UAA 1. Tanto él como Hawkyard logran observar la línea de marcación en la consola de Rose en correlación con dos contactos a 45 millas en la presentación del AWO del radar de alarma aérea de gran alcance.

"Transmisión interrumpida", informa Rose.

Hawkyard hace una llamada por la línea abierta de comando: "AWO a oficial de guardia: ¡Cubrir zafarrancho de combate, de inmediato!".



Un misil argentino Exocet hizo impacto en el centro del HMS* Sheffield, *en el costado de estribor, a un par de metros por encima de la línea de flotación. Fue el primer buque de guerra de la Armada Real en recibir un impacto enemigo desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Arriba, en el puente, el teniente de navío David Goddard pulsa el botón del intercomunicador y su voz de "¡Zafarrancho de combate!" se difunde por todo el buque.

Hawkyard, concentrado en la imagen de la gran pantalla horizontal de su mesa, emplea la radio de UHF para anunciar a todos los buques: "¡Flash! Aquí *Glasgow*, Agave... marcación dos tres ocho... se correlaciona con contacto uno dos tres cuatro... marcación dos tres ocho... alcance cuatro cero... *Invincible*, cambio".

Invincible: "Recibido, corto".

Entonces Rose avisa nuevamente: "Agave recuperado; marcación dos tres ocho".

Su supervisor de guerra electrónica, sentado a su lado, confirma la segunda detección. Los operadores de radar del buque, observando sus pantallas de los radares de alarma de aire y superficie, también confirman el contacto: "Dos espectros. Marcación dos tres ocho. Alcance tres ocho millas. Arrumbamiento cero siete cero. Cuatro-cincuenta nudos".

Hawkyard a Hoddinott: "Son dos "Super E". Acaban de subir para asegurarse. Pueden estar próximos a lanzar misiles". Y ahora la central de operaciones del *Glasgow* realmente cobra vida. Se hallan 100% preparados para este evento. Después de todo, precisamente para eso es que se encuentran allí.

"¡Chaff!" ordena Hawkyard, y del otro lado del compartimento, la encapuchada figura del suboficial Jan Ames golpea violentamente con sus puños cerrados contra los enormes y notorios botones de disparo del chaff.

Hawkyard repite su llamada por el circuito radial a todo el grupo de batalla: "Aquí *Glasgow*..." En cuanto empieza a hablar, de repente se acuerda que debía mencionar "Hard-ware", nuestra palabra en código para el radar Agave. Ahora se corrige, apurado. "¡Handbrake!", exclama, "Marcación dos tres ocho".

Simultáneamente, los dedos del supervisor de imagen aérea, el cabo Nevin, se mueven con destreza tratando de obtener la imagen completa de los incursores en acercamiento, que responden a la denominación de contactos 1234 y 1235 en el circuito 10, de intercomunicación entre las computadoras de los buques. Entonces, luego observar por sobre su hombre la presencia del relevo listo a tomar la guardia, el cabo Hewitt, supervisor de guerra electrónica, le hace entrega rápidamente y sale volando hacia la cubierta superior por la empinada escala, para ayudar a recargar los lanzadores de cohetes de chaff. "Nunca", admitió más tarde, "me moví tan rápido en mi vida entera".

Mientras se retira el cabo, Hawkyard vuelve a llamar por UHF y trata de convencer al jefe de defensa aérea de la fuerza, embarcado en el *Invincible*, de que la amenaza es real. Pero no tiene éxito. Hoddinott escucha alarmado que la voz de Hawkyard se eleva con frustración, tratando desesperadamente de convencer a su interlocutor de que la cosa va en serio, y no es otro "fantasma" producido por los nervios...

El jefe de defensa aérea, quien ha tenido que ocuparse de otros tres o cuatro pánicos similares en esa misma mañana, requiere mayor evidencia. En lo que al él respecta, el grito de "Handbrake" ha sido escuchado más a menudo que "buen día" en esta jornada, y no se halla dispuesto a comprometer las menguadas existenciales de chaff en toda la fuerza sin una sólida razón.

El *Invincible* responde: "Recibido, corto".

Pero al menos debe haber interpretado que el *Glasgow* estaba muy seguro de su propia alarma. Cualquiera que escuche en la red de guerra aérea puede oir el lanzamiento de sus cohetes de chaff, con ese incómodo siseo que pronto ha de resultarnos tan familiar.

Abajo, en la consola de guerra electrónica, Rose informa de nuevo: "Handbrake en modo enganchado".

Bedacarratz está a punto de lanzar su misil, y Paul Hoddinott siente el terrible escalofrío que se apodera de uno cuando enfrenta la incontrovertibvle evidencia de que un gran misil está en camino hacia este lado. Durante los siguientes minutos, la técnica aplicada por el *Glasgow* consiste en mantenerse meticulosamente en medio de las cuatro nubes de chaff brotadas a su alrededor, y que servirán para engañar al misil apartándolo de su curso hacia el buque. Pero las nubes de chaff derivan con el viento; para mantener la posición es necesario recurrir a correcciones rápidas del desplazamiento.

A 14.02 horas los pilotos lanzan sus misiles y giran

escarpadamente hacia la izquierda. Ambos Exocet comienzan a caer, enganchados en sus propios blancos. Ninguno de los pilotos tiene la menor idea sobre los buques hacia los que han apuntado, ni van a quedarse allí para averiguarlo. Sólo saben que apareció un contacto radar en sus pantallas, aproximadamente en la posición correspondiente del océano. Y escapan rápidamente, volviendo a picar a ras de las olas, por debajo de nuestros haces de radar, rumbo hacia el oeste.

Nunca volvimos a detectarlos.

Casi simultáneamente, dos puntos de color ámbar, tan pequeños que sólo son vistos en forma intermitente, aparecen en el radar del *Glasgow*, registrándose su veloz paso a través de las pantallas.

"¡Zippo Uno! ¡Matones! En acercamiento. Marcación dos tres ocho. distancia doce millas".

Hoddinott ordena entrar en acción a su sistema de misiles superficie-aire Sea Dart, para derribarlos.

Hawkyard llama nuevamente al suboficial Ames, su director del lanzador de misiles: "Tome los contactos 1234 y 1235 con Sea Dart". Pero no funciona. De manera espeluznante, el radar de control tiro no puede engancharse sobre los pequeños blancos huidizos a esa distancia. Continúan intentándolo, pero los puntos se les escapan. Surge la frustración, y el comandante se enfurece. Hawkyard llama otra vez al *Invincible*, advirtiéndole que despeje a dos Sea Harrier de la línea de tiro. Pero la central de operaciones del pequeño portaaviones responde que ellos aprecian que el ataque no es real.

El AWO del *Glasgow*, desesperado, ya casi grita por el circuito: "¡Negativo! ¡La fuerza se halla bajo ataque! Marcación y distancia de contactos 1234 y 1235 se correlacionan con "Handbrake".

Invincible todavía no concuerda.

Mientras el suboficial Ames aún trata rabiosamente de enganchar los Exocet con el Sea Dart, no puede evitar preguntarse cuánto demorará el misil en hacer impacto, temiendo que golpee en medio del *Glasgow*, donde se halla la central de operaciones. Como muchos otros, comienza a resignarse de su suerte.

Es el capitán Hoddinott el primero en percibir, con enorme alivio, que el *Glasgow* está a salvo. Uno de los misiles se dirige hacia el *Sheffield*, y el otro pasa muy alejado.

Mientras tanto, en el *Sheffield*, el capitán Salt no se encuentra en la central de operaciones y por alguna razón no se ha lanzado chaff. Hoddinott recordaría más tarde haberle dicho a Hawkyard, preocupado: "¿Qué diablos le ocurre al *Sheffield*?" La única respuesta que recibió provino de sus propios operadores, quienes manifestaron que no obtenían ligazón.

A treinta millas de distancia, las cosas se deslizaban hacia una trágica conclusión en el pequeño destructor bautizado con el nombre de la ciudad británica del acero inoxidable. El primer problema era que se hallaba transmitiendo con sus sistema de comunicaciones vía satélite en el instante crítico en que los Super Etendard emplearon sus radares. Eso le impidió detectarlos.

Por otra parte, la ausencia del comandante, quien se encontraba de sobremesa en su cámara, fue pura mala suerte, pero no hubo ninguna negligencia. Tenía todo el derecho a hallarse en sus aposentos. El comandante no debe tratar de permanecer en alerta por tiempo indefinido, si ha de desempeñarse con efectividad. Su responsabilidad consiste en regular meticulosamente su horario, y en aprender a confiar en su personal apostado.

El segundo problema fue que no se interpretó correctamente el significado de los informes del *Glasgow*. Por algún motivo se produjo una laguna en su central de

operaciones y no se adoptó ninguna acción, ni se detectaron los aviones ni los misiles por medio de los radares. Es posible suponer que si la alarma del *Glasgow* sobre el radar de los Super Etendard hubiera sido aceptada en la central de operaciones del *Sheffield*, se hubiera lanzado chaff que podría haber resultado efectivo; o que los propios radares del *Sheffield* podrían haber detectado a los Super Etendard y a los misiles en aproximación. Después de todo, se encontraban cuatro millas más cerca, si bien presentando un blanco radar mucho menor al *Sheffield* que al *Glastow*. Asimismo, el *Sheffield* había demostrado un desempeño óptimo en dicho procedimiento apenas unas pocas semanas atrás, en ejercitaciones de lanzamiento efectivo de misiles frente a Gibraltar. Ahora, en guerra ¿cómo podía tener una perfomance inferior!

Cualquiera haya sido el motivo, el hecho es que el chaff del *Sheffield* no fue lanzado a 14.03 horas. Arriba, en el puente, los tenientes de navío Peter Walpole y Brian Layshon se hallaban mirando hacia la amura de estribor, cuando avistaron una estela de humo a un par de metros sobre la superficie del mar, a alrededor de una milla de distancia y dirigiéndose directamente hacia el buque. Solamente quedaban pocos segundos. Uno de ambos tomó el micrófono del difusor de órdenes y gritó: "¡Ataque de misil! ¡Tirarse a cubierta!".

El Exocet hizo impacto a 14.04 horas. En medio del buque. Costado de estribor. Un par de metros sobre la flotación. Hay ciertas dudas sobre si la carga de combate explotó, pero varios hombres perecieron instantáneamente. Se inició un enorme incendio, despidiéndose grandes cantidades de calor y humo que provocaron otras muertes, algunas de ellas en heroicas circunstancias. El *Sheffield* fue el primer buque de la Armada Real en recibir un impacto enemigo desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial...

"El *Sheffield* ha sufrido una explosión". Nada más definitivo ni descriptivo que eso. Acuso recibo, pero permito que continúe la rutina habitual...

La información sigue filtrándose, aunque en forma lenta y metódica. Ninguna noticia como para publicar en primera plana. A pesar de que puedo ver a la *Arrow*, la *Yarmouth* y los helicópteros en cercanías del *Sheffield*, aumenta la tensión en la central de operaciones del almirante, en el *Hermes*. Cada uno de nosotros lo percibe, como si nos encontráramos en cierto modo desvalidos, y que tendríamos que actuar. Uno de mis ayudantes me espeta: "Almirante, ¡usted debe hacer algo!". Que es precisamente lo que no estoy haciendo. Lo reconozco.

Respondo con bastante cortesía: "No ... quédese tranquilo...".

Parece que el fuego se escapa de control; los hombres del capitán Salt necesitan agua y bombas desesperadamente. Les mandamos éstas por medio de helicópteros. La dotación de la central de cómputos permaneció demasiado tiempo en sus puestos, tratando de mantener operativo el sistema de defensa del buque. Todos murieron. El suboficial Briggs siguió yendo y viniendo de la central de control de averías de proa para traer más equipos. Finalmente, vencido por el humo, también falleció...

A media tarde, al aumentar el riesgo de que se produjera una gran explosión, el capitán Salt impartió la orden de abandonar el buque, y la tripulación remanente fue trasladada por los helicópteros a las fragatas.

Poco después, Sam Salt arribó al *Hermes*. Por su forma de tragar saliva noté que estaba próximo al llanto, mas no por ello era menos valiente, en ese día tan terrible. Tratamos como mejor pudimos de hablar en tono desapasionado, para mantener la situación bajo control; sin embargo, me temo que la preocupación me hizo aparecer muy poco simpático. (Años después, Sam me contó que el dije secamente: "Sospecho que alguien ha mostrado una total negligencia"). Sólo recuerdo que era consciente de mis esfuerzos para evitar que la situación se escapara de control, así como de los suyos...

Mientras tanto, el *Sheffield* continuaba incendiándose; ya sus planchas de cubierta se habían recalentado mucho, y aparecían por todas partes grandes parches de pintura ampollada. El fuego se lo devoraba lentamente, pero aún no había llegado a la santabárbara. Sam Salt quería ir a verificar la posibilidad de salvarlo. Lo postergué hasta el día siguiente, porque no quise arriesgar un helicóptero ni las vidas de algunos de mis hombres cuando todos sabíamos perfectamente que podía estallar en cualquier momento. Por otra parte, suponiendo que el pobre buque pudiera salvarse, ya estaba tan seriamente averiado que carecía de valor militar, y quizás ni siquiera para chatarra...

Al anochecer, con el *Sheffield* todavía en llamas, volvimos a una apariencia de rutina. La misión de reconocimiento se cumplió según lo planeado, las tropas especiales desembarcaron en el horario previsto, y todos los helicópteros regresaron puntualmente a bordo. Continuaba la habitual tarea de conducir el grupo de batalla, pero ahora con mayor conciencia de la posibilidad de otro ataque de Exocet. Podía comenzar a planificar el futuro, al menos con la satisfacción de tener el grupo de batalla nuevamente en equilibrio y de que la situación del *Sheffield* se estaba manejando adecuadamente.

Ahora debo tratar de dormir, lo que será difícil, aunque me sienta muy cansado, porque nuestros próximos movimientos tienen que planificarse meticulosamente. La palabra clave es **control**: control de nuestros ataques, control de nuestra defensa, y control de nosotros mismos al enfrentar el desastre.

De cualquier modo que se lo mire, durante casi toda mi vida me he adiestrado para esto, o para algo similar, si bien confiaba en que nunca sucedería. sin embargo, este día estaba preparando su llegada para enriquecer las tradiciones militares y navales. El primer buque de guerra británico perdido por el impacto de un misil. El primer ataque de importancia en décadas contra la Armada Real. Sigo preguntándome cómo es que vine a quedar en medio de todo esto. Nunca pretendí figurar en ningún libro de historia. Tampoco lo quiso ninguno de los tripulantes del *Sheffield*. Y veinte de ellos murieron.

El almirante Woodward se halla actualmente retirado del servicio. Como comandante de la Primera Flotilla, tuvo bajo su mando al Grupo de Tareas del Atlántico Sur en el Conflicto de las Malvinas. Ingresó a la Armada Real en 1946, a los trece años de edad. El señor Robinson es autor de cinco libros, incluyendo el best-seller internacional *Born to win.*

* **Newsweek** - 25 Mayo de 1992.

Entre varios artículos de índole diversa que publica, se destaca el titulado "Finding Order in Chaos" ("Orden en el caos"), por su relación con nuestro **BCN** 765, como más adelante se explica.

Además de puntualizar que en el artículo la expresión contradictoria involucrada en el título se califica con el adjetivo inglés oxymoronic (como esta otra, sad pleasure, por ejemplo), el trabajo se refiere a sistemas tan diferentes como la meteorología, los ritmos cardíacos y -tal vez- la bola de la ruleta.

Esos sistemas tienen tres características. Uno: un sistema caótico que comienza ordenadamente puede disolverse en una completa desorganización; como cuando la columna de humo de un cigarrillo se convierte en una nube giratoria, aun en ausencia de corrientes de aire.

Dos: puntos de partida casi idénticos pueden llegar a convertirse en puntos finales radicalmente distintos. Esto es lo que se denomina sensibilidad extrema a las condiciones iniciales. Por ejemplo, una computadora puede hacer una predicción meteorológica basada en seis dígitos de un dato,

Historia Marítima Argentina

TOMO 10

1G

Historia Marítima Argentina

Tomo X

ARMADA ARGENTINA
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yo, tomó contacto sobre una formación de buques británicos (portaaviones y sus escoltas), que desde una dirección general Noreste se acercaban a Malvinas para atacar Puerto Argentino.

Obtenida esta primera posición del enemigo que lo ubicaba a 031° 120 millas del Puerto Argentino, se mantuvo el contacto y su posición por medio de las sucesivas aeronaves catapultadas de relevo.

Confirmada la posición de la Fuerza de Tarea enemiga, se resolvió efectuar un ataque aéreo en la madrugada del 2 de mayo con el Grupo Aeronaval Embarcado (8 aviones A-4Q), pero las desfavorables condiciones del viento en cubierta ese día impidieron el decolaje de los cazabombarderos, perdiéndose así una oportunidad única en el desarrollo de estas operaciones,

Posteriormente, el Grupo Aeronaval Embarcado por el portaaviones comenzó a operar desde bases en el continente, juntamente con aviones B-111 Bandeirante (incorporados en esos días) como aviación costera, volando estos últimos un total de 206 horas y cumpliendo 30 misiones operativas entre el 22 de mayo y el 13 de junio.

h. Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Helicópteros; compuesta por 2 helicópteros Sea-King. Esta escuadrilla durante el período comprendido entre el 18 de abril y el 9 de mayo estuvo embarcada en el portaaviones ARA *25 de Mayo* en configuración antisubmarina obteniéndose e investigándose el día 5 de mayo, juntamente con aviones Tracker del portaaviones, un contacto submarino. A partir del 10 de mayo, un tercer helicóptero comenzó a operar desde la Base Aeronaval Comandante Espora.

i. Primera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Ataque; compuesta por 20 aviones MC-32 y 33 Aeromacchi. Esta escuadrilla se desplegó a lo largo del litoral atlántico, ordenándosele destacar una división a Puerto Argentino entre el 2 y 23 de abril. La finalidad esencial era dar apoyo de fuego al Batallón de Infantería de Marina Nº 5, con el cual era común el adiestramiento en la isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

El día 3 de mayo se le impuso la primera misión de ataque sobre una presunta unidad naval enemiga; la búsqueda realizada por una sección resultó infructuosa y al proceder al aterrizaje, el numeral teniente de fragata Ricardo A. Benítez se estrelló, debido a las desfavorables condiciones meteorológicas, produciéndose así la primera víctima de la Aviación Naval en Puerto Argentino.

j. Se movilizaron asimismo los aviones T-34 de adiestramiento, pertenecientes a la Escuela de Aviación Naval, a partir del día 24 de abril. Varias secciones fueron artilladas para misiones de reconocimiento en Puerto Argentino. En una de esas misiones tuvieron un encuentro con aviones caza Harriers, pero pese a su baja velocidad lograron evadirse de una segura destrucción, ocultándose entre las nubes.

La mayor parte de ellos fue destruida en tierra el 15 de mayo en el ataque comando efectuado al Aeródromo Auxiliar Calderón (en isla Borbón) por fuerzas especiales británicas.

6. Hundimiento del destructor HMS *Sheffield*

Aun habiéndose desarrollado en un teatro de operaciones de naturaleza esencialmente marítima, el conflicto Malvinas tuvo en el espacio aéreo su gran escenario. Luego de la recuperación de los asentamientos argentinos y hasta la caída de Puerto Argentino a mediados del mes de junio, fue el modo aéreo el gran protagonista de este choque entre nuestro país y Gran Bretaña en el Atlántico Sur.

El derroche de arrojo y heroicidad de las tripulaciones de la Aviación Naval y de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina y el gran porcentaje de pérdidas sufridas no fue suficiente para modificar el fin de la gesta en la que Gran Bretaña finalmente pudo recuperar las islas.

La batalla aeronaval comenzó en las primeras horas del 1º de mayo con los aviones Harrier lanzados desde los portaaviones británicos, los que efectuaron fuertes ataques en Puerto Argentino, sobre el aeropuerto e instalaciones portuarias, en búsqueda de producir el aislamiento de la guarnición argentina. Fueron rechazados con leves pérdidas por ambas partes. Como dato interesante cabe hacer notar que la pequeña pista aérea de Malvinas, de 1.200 m de longitud, que fuera construida por nuestro país en la década del 70 para facilitar las comunicaciones con las Islas, a pesar de los reiterados ataques sufridos durante todo el período bélico ya sea por los Harrier como por grandes aviones Vulcan lanzados desde la isla Ascensión, recibió en realidad un solo impacto, el que no impidió su operación, que continuó sin interrupción hasta el día de la rendición, el 14 de junio.

Decimos que aquí comenzó el duelo aéreo, pese a que el 25 de abril, sobre el área de operaciones de Georgias, la Fuerza Aérea Argentina luego de un reconocimiento intentó realizar un ataque sobre las unidades británicas que recuperarían Grytviken y Leith, por medio de una formación de bombarderos Canberra. Volaron precedidos por un avión explorador C-130 que advirtió malas condiciones meteorológicas en bahía Cumberland, razón por la cual se canceló la operación.

El 2 de mayo por la tarde fue hundido el crucero ARA *General Belgrano* en un ataque con

torpedos por el submarino HMS *Conqueror*, con gran pérdida de vidas argentinas. La Aviación Naval cooperó allí con sus aeronaves en la búsqueda de náufragos, realizando el primer contacto con las balsas y permitiendo a las unidades de superficie recobrar con vida a la mayoría de ellos.

Llegamos así al día 3 de mayo de 1982, fecha en que por primera vez un buque de guerra de superficie, perteneciente a la flota de una potencia mundial, es hundido por aviones argentinos en un ataque con misiles aire-mar. Este hecho tan significativo para la Aviación Naval Argentina marcó un hito en la guerra aeronaval moderna y provocó instantáneamente en el área de las operaciones un profundo cambio de pensamiento al OCT británico, hasta entonces optimista en sus posibilidades, luego de la fácil captura de las pobremente defendidas Grytviken y Leith.

Las prevenciones que este episodio originó en almirante Woodward modificaron de allí en más el uso estratégico-táctico de sus portaaviones y por consiguiente de su aviación embarcada, complicando la ejecución del planeamiento británico para asegurar la superioridad aérea en el área del objetivo. Si la esquiva suerte hubiese acompañado en mayor medida a las Fuerzas Armadas argentinas, aunque quizás el desenlace de esta guerra no hubiese variado, el precio a pagar por el vencedor hubiera sido más alto.

El ataque contra el destructor HMS *Sheffield* exigió una intensa preparación de la operación, ya que no se contaba con experiencia previa respecto de la faz táctica. Por otra parte al inicio de las hostilidades, los técnicos franceses que estaban en Argentina preparando los misiles se habían retirado por orden del gobierno galo, lo que imponía para los técnicos argentinos una cuidadosa verificación del arma y su sistema.

Todo fue realizado con personal de la Armada aprovechando las características de los destructores ARA *Hércules* y *Santísima Trinidad*, los que por su similitud con los británicos permitieron llevar a cabo ataques simulados sobre buques de superficie con los aviones Super Etendard, equipados con el nuevo misil Exocet AM-39 (aire-superficie).

El adiestramiento de las tripulaciones de las aeronaves requería una técnica muy especial por el manejo rápido y preciso del sistema, ya que este misil era del tipo "dispare y olvídese". Además debía volarse muy bajo para evitar ser detectado por el enemigo en un móvil como el Super Etendard que volaría cerca de los 1.000 Km por hora, rozando el agua, en un trabajo de dos aviones en el que no podían comunicarse los pilotos entre sí. Paralelamente y dada la limitada autonomía del avión para la operación que exigía un prolongado vuelo indirecto, las tripulaciones deberían prever reabastecerse en vuelo, maniobra que se practicó con un KC-130 perteneciente a la Fuerza Aérea. La técnica del ataque exigía además una búsqueda ajustada, ya que el explorador, una vez adquirido el blanco, debía radiar a los aviones atacantes la posición del blanco y su constitución, teniendo en cuenta que era deseable que el avión se mantuviera en contacto para actualizar la posición hasta instantes previos al ataque.

Los aviones aptos para esta tarea eran precisamente los aviones SP2H Neptune que, como expresáramos, estaban desarrollando la última etapa de vida útil en la Armada Argentina.

El ataque que posteriormente produjo el hundimiento del destructor británico fue en realidad el único donde se iban a cumplir exactamente todas las previsiones iniciales.

El día 4 de mayo de 1982, el avión explorador Neptune 2-P-112 denunció la posición inicial del enemigo a unas 100 millas al sur de Puerto Argentino, aproximadamente a 380 millas de la Base Aeronaval Río Grande, donde se hallaban apostados los aviones Super Etendard. A 09.45 hs. se ordenó el despegue de una sección de estos aviones navales armados con misiles Exocet AM-39 para atacar, mientras el Neptune iba actualizando la posición del enemigo.

A 10.30 hs. en medio de chubascos y bancos de niebla, con una visibilidad de 1.000 m y un techo de 500 pies, hallándose la sección a 115 millas del blanco, se recibió del avión explorador la posición actualizada del enemigo (que definía a dos buques medianos y uno grande), iniciándose la fase final del ataque.

A 11.04 hs. estando a distancia de fuego y adquisición del misil los aviones Super Etendard dispararon sus AM-39, invirtiendo su rumbo e iniciándose el escape del vuelo rasante.

En el instante del lanzamiento sus radares tenían adquirido el blanco y no registraban en sus sensores interferencia electrónica alguna, señal inequívoca de que el enemigo no había advertido la aproximación de las aeronaves atacantes.

Uno de los dos misiles lanzados hizo impacto en el centro del destructor HMS *Sheffield*, sobre la línea de flotación, produciendo un incendio de grandes proporciones que no pudo ser controlado al extenderse rápidamente por la nave, que debió ser abandonada por su tripulación. El mal tiempo reinante produjo el ingreso de grandes masas de agua por el orificio de entrada del misil, lo que ocasionó una progresiva inundación que culmino con su hundimiento el 10 de mayo. El otro misil, según informes no confirmados, pudo haber hecho impacto en el portaaviones HMS *Hermes*.

Las consecuencias políticas y militares de este ataque aeronaval fueron significativas para el conflicto en general y para ambos bandos en particular, ya que amén de revolucionar la guerra

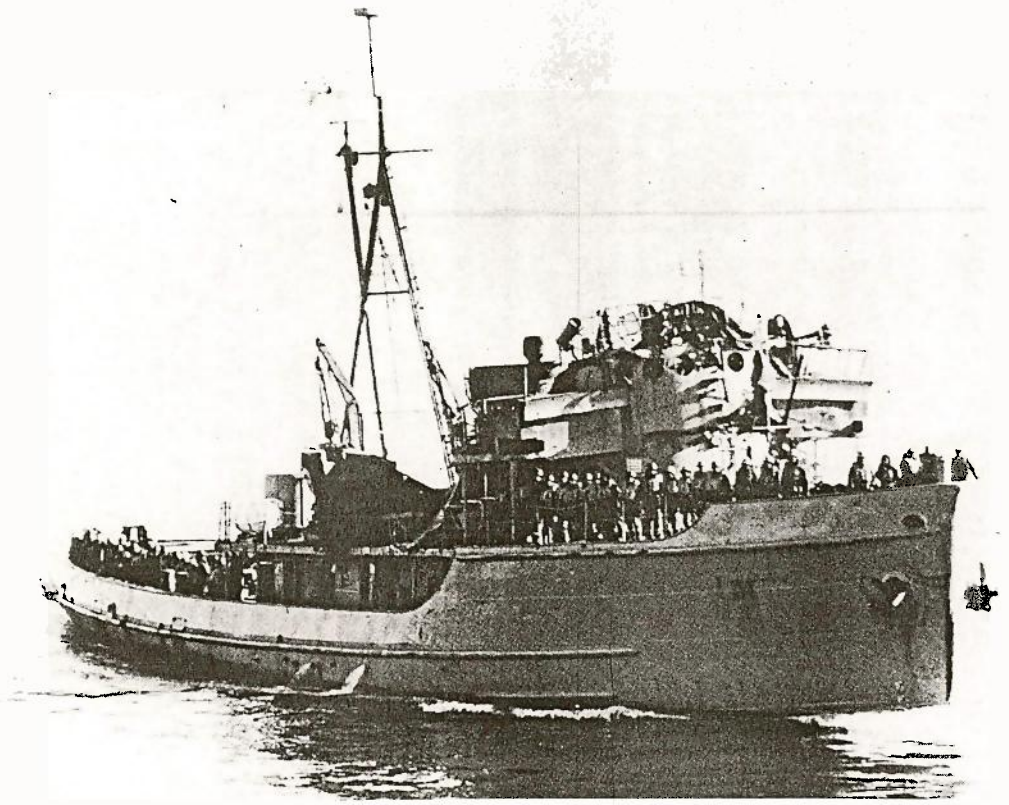


Figura 11. Aviso ARA *Alférez Sobral* navegando hacia Puerto Deseado en la tarde del 5 de mayo de 1982.

en el mar, complicó el camino hacia un final negociado.

7. Ataque al aviso ARA *Alférez Sobral*

Durante el período abarcado por estas acciones se produjeron hechos relevantes que tuvieron por protagonistas a hombres, buques y aeronaves que les permiten por peso propio agregar páginas plagadas de heroísmo en la historia de este conflicto.

El ataque aéreo sufrido por el aviso ARA *Alférez Sobral* es un episodio que merece, dentro de ese marco, una especial consideración.

Debido a un ataque fallido sobre la Fuerza de Tarea británica, una escuadrilla de Canberra había perdido uno de sus aviones en la ruta Trelew-Malvinas. A 17.30 hs. del 1º de mayo en latitud 49°30' (S) y longitud 59°35 (W), se eyectaron dos tripulantes, habiéndose avistado los paracaídas en el aire luego de la interceptación realizada por una patrulla aérea de combate británica. Los sobrevivientes fueron vistos por pesqueros polacos ubicados en las inmediaciones y escuchados emitiendo en frecuencias de socorro internacionales. El comandante del Teatro de Operaciones ordenó al comandante de la Fuerza de Tarea 50 que procediera al urgente rescate de los náufragos, destacándose al aviso ARA *Alférez Sobral* con la misión ordenada.

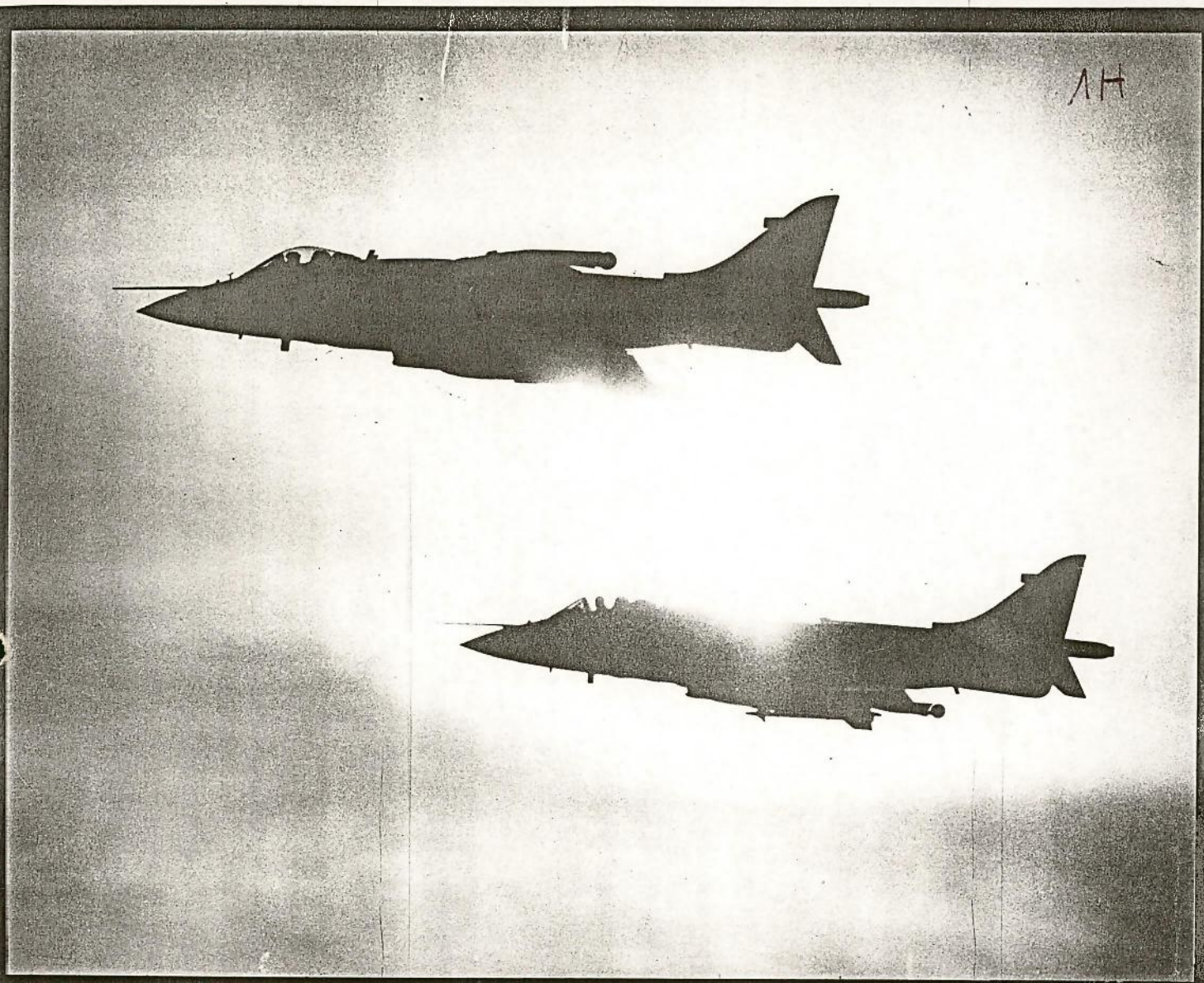
La tarea era de alto riesgo ya que el buque debía internarse sin ningún apoyo en la zona de exclusión declarada por los británicos. El comandante del buque, capitán de corbeta Sergio Gómez Roca, era plenamente consciente de la grave amenaza que se cernía sobre su unidad, de lo que hizo partícipe a su segundo comandante. Sin embargo a los minutos de recibir la orden zarpó hacia el rumbo citado.

El 2 de mayo, cerca de las 8 de la mañana, recibió un mensaje donde se le informaba que un fuerte Grupo de Tarea británico se hallaba a 100 millas del punto dato hacia el que el ARA *Alférez Sobral* navegaba.

Las circunstancias representaban una fuerte amenaza para la nave, ya que la zona estaba expresamente vedada por el enemigo, contando el oponente con variados medios aéreos de guerra, buques de combate y aun submarinos para hacerla cumplir.

El buque, dentro de sus escasas posibilidades, adoptó ciertos recaudos: navegó con todas sus luces encendidas, izó la bandera de la Cruz Roja a tope del palo; emitió en forma continua con su

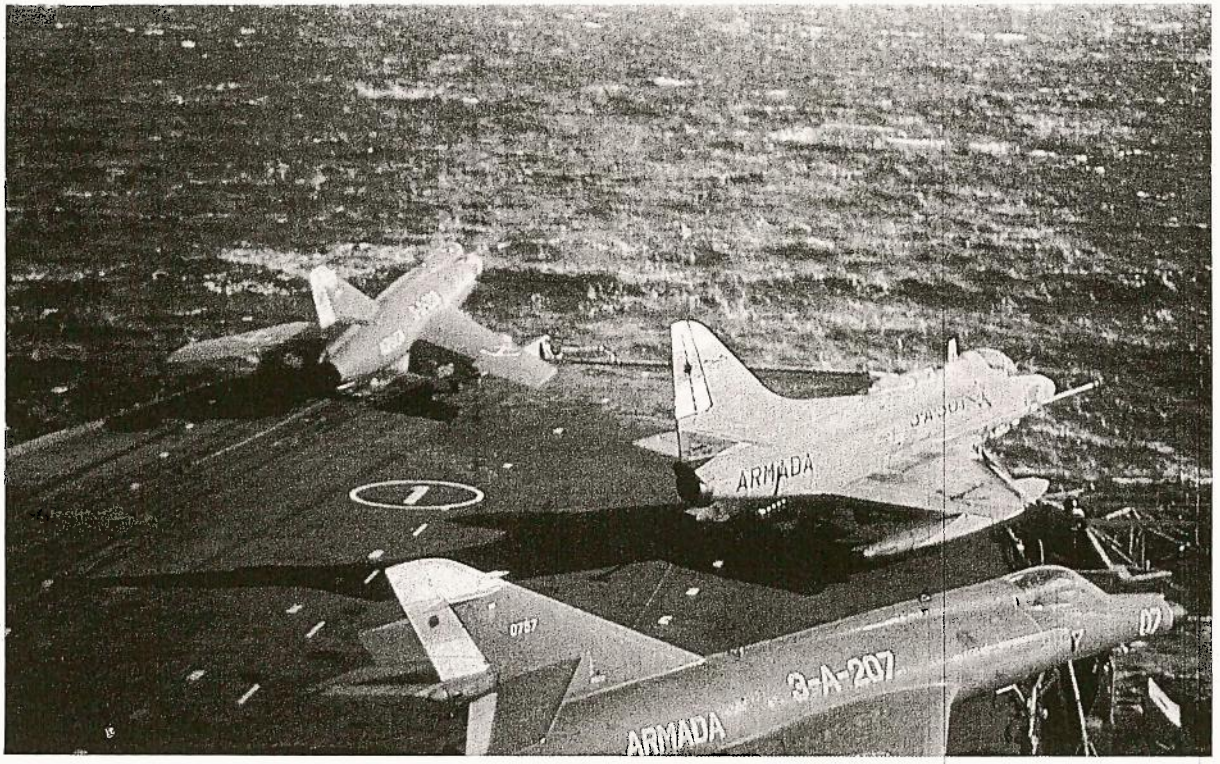
Falklands
Witness of Battles



FALKLANDS
WITNESS OF BATTLES

by

JESUS ROMERO BRIASCO & SALVADOR MAFE HUERTAS
Major, Spanish Air Force — Aviation Historian



2.ª Escuadrilla Super Etendard being catapulted from 25 de Mayo

in a risky rescue operation performed on 31 may by two 2.ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Helicópteros Sikorsky SH-3 Ds which departed Rio Grande at 14:30 hrs., returning at 21:55 hrs. This operation complemented the one carried out by the Air Force with Twin Otter STOL planes on 28 and 29.

3.ª ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE

Until the arrival of the first Dassault Super Etendard strike fighters, the 3.ª Escuadrilla Douglas A-4Q Skyhawks were the most potent warplanes in service with the Argentine Navy.

When the crisis flared-up on April 2nd. 1982, the unit had on strength a total 11 operational Skyhawks —from 16 received during the early seventies—, being landbased at BAN Comandate Espora, Bahía Blanca while frequent cruises are made aboard the carrier ARA 25 de Mayo. The unit is within the 3.ª Escuadra Aeronaval (Naval Air Wing).

On April 2nd., the following pilots were posted to the Escuadrilla. Lt. Cdr. Castro Fox —C.O.—, Lt. Cdr. Philippi, Lt. Cdr. Zubizarreta, Lts. Lecour, Sylvester, Arca, Benítez, Oliveira and Rótolo; Lts. (jg) Márquez and Olmedo and finally Ensign Medici.

A dispatch was received by the unit to ready themselves for deploying aboard the carrier by late March, and on April 2nd., the 3.ª Escuadrilla was aboard with most of its A-4 Qs sailing to the north of the Falklands providing air cover to the Argentine landings, not using their weapons in anger during this opportunity.

One month later, on May 2nd., a day after the first British air and naval bombardments of objectives in the island, the naval fleets of both countries were close to engage in combat, the Argentine fleet was to the northwest and the British to the northeast of the Falklands; It was the only time in the 44-day war that such as event like this took place, and having taken place the engagement, perhaps the final results would have been somewhat different.

During this day aboard the Argentine carrier the Skyhawks were ordered in a maximum state of deck readiness in preparation of a possible strike against one of the Royal Navy carriers, but in the following hours, —the strike was delayed several times while the aircraft were loaded with 500 bombs and the crews ready in their narrow cockpits—, the attack was cancelled

because of light winds in the Argentine Task Group operations area, not allowing the launching of the fully fuel and bomb laden Skyhawks and also because the British Task Force was well displaced to the east, so the range problems became unsormountable, at the same time the news of the sinking of the cruiser ARA General Belgrano fell as a bucket of cold water over the Argentine fleet.

But up to May 9th., the Argentine carrier 25 de Mayo, and her escorts went sailing in the high seas, although respectfully distanced from the Task Force, the A-4Qs having made until then, nine air defence sorties from the carrier as «bandits» were picked-up by the long range surveillance radars of Argentine's Navy Type 42 destroyers, although during these there was not visual contact with Royal Navy Sea Harriers.

From then on and seemingly by technical problems, the 25 de Mayo returned to port, staying during the rest of the war docked at Puerto Belgrano. But it is clear that after the General Belgrano sinking, and due in part to the Argentine Navy lack of modern anti-submarine warfare means to counter the Royal Navy nuclear submarines, within the Command was noted a «Belgrano syndrome», sending the fleet to their respective harbours in a primary survival instinct.

Once docked at Puerto Belgrano, the 3.ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque and their Skyhawks were deployed to the Rio Grande Naval Air Station located in the inhospitable Tierra del Fuego, from where they continued to operate up to war's end.

The day in which the British forces landed at San Carlos, —21 may—, the 3.ª Escuadrilla made six combat sorties, losing 50% of the aircraft involved. The formations were composed as follows:

1st. Section: Lt. Cdr. Philippi, Lt. (jg) Márquez and Lt. Arca.

2nd. Section: Lts. Rótolo, Lecour and Sylvester.

After attacking the Type 21 frigate HMS Ardent, the first section was jumped by two Hermes Sea Harriers, while the A-4Q Skyhawks were trying to make good their escape towards the Falklands Sound southern entrance.

Lt. Morrell launched an AIM-9L which practically flew up exhaust nozzle of Philippi's Skyhawks, disintigrating the rear of the aircraft, pitching up at the same time in an exaggerated way, the Argentine naval pilot did not think about twice, and before it was too late ejected from the mortally hit 3-A-314, falling into the Sound cold waters near East Falkland Island, with some troubles as the dinghy provided in the survival pack did not inflate, Philippi started to swim to the shore, near it he became entangled with the local seaweed (kelpers), once liberated with the aid of the knife, arrived completely exhausted to the beach, sleeping the first night without any cover; next day, several explosions nearby woke him up, it was still dark, although the glow from them had made him think the contrary, now he could observe several star shells fired by a Royal Navy frigate to illuminate a beached Argentine cargo vessel, which had been attacked and damaged by Sea Harriers six days before.

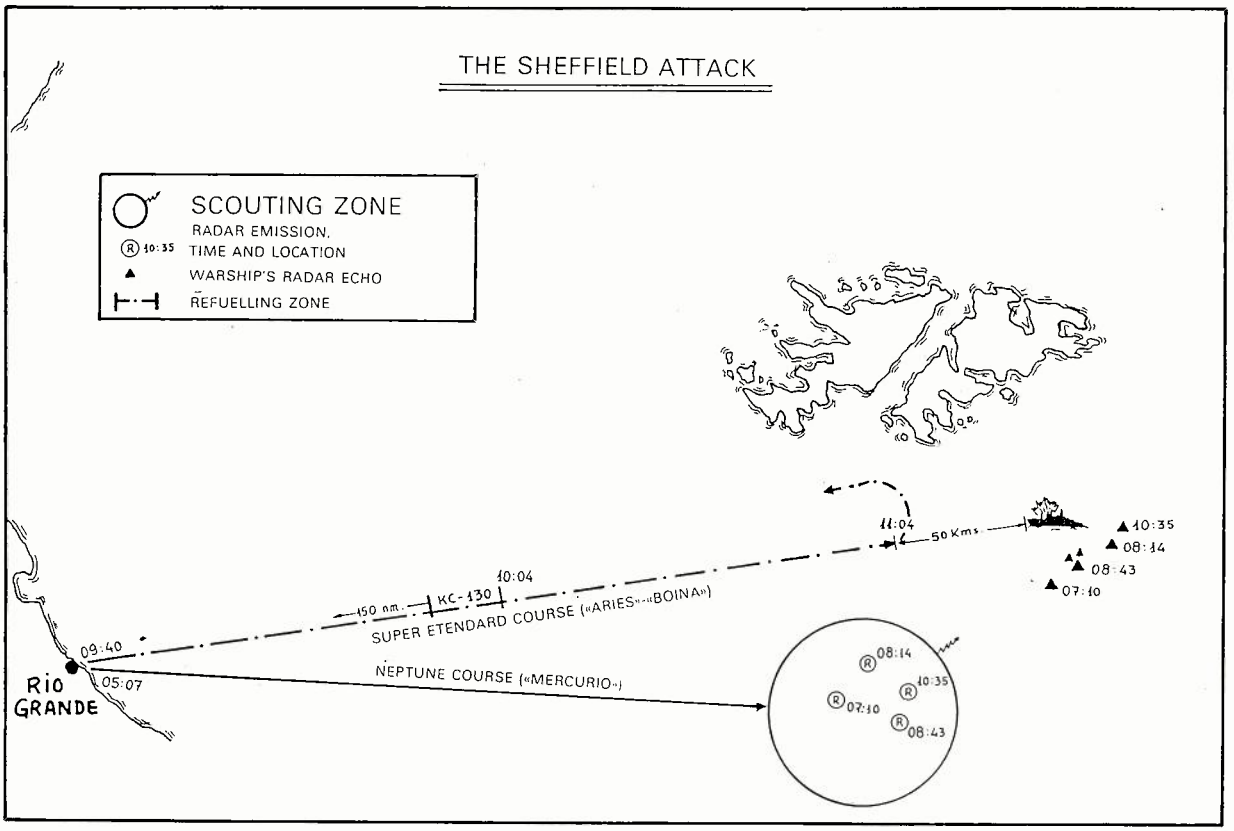
While trekking during the day several Fuerza Aérea Skyhawk formations were seen going and returning from the San Carlos Water area; after many hours he found an abandoned little house, receiving some help from a group of Kelpers which passed by, as they had a radio set, they sent a message to the Argentine HQ. at Port Stanley. Four days after being downed, Philippi was picked-up by a Fuerza Aérea helicopter, being evacuated to the mainland in a C-130.

Meanwhile, Flt. Lt. Leeming, the other Sea Harrier pilot aboard XZ 500, triggered a 30 mm. gunfire burst which struck the A-4Q, 3-A-307, blowing up in a reddish fireball falling the remains into the Sound, its pilot Lt. (jg) Márquez had no time to eject.

Almost at the same time, Morrell tried to launch his second Sidewinder, but the missile refused to leave the rack, so he pushed to the gate the throttle closing to gun range, after several bursts, Arca —which had seen how his leader had been downed and was making himself violent evasive maneuvers at low level— noted that the faithful Skyhawk had been mortally hit. The British pilot tried again to fire the missile, and this time it dropped but followed an erratic trajectory, falling to the water behind the target; The A-4Q's warning panel lights started to lit up one after another as a Christmas tree, the principal hydraulic system had been shot-off; with the Skyhawk in an uncontrollable skid, which if it had not been because of the experience of the pilot would have crashed into the water. The Sea Harriers short of fuel, turned to the east gaining height for the return to their ship to Arca's relief.

After checking that the aircraft still flew more or less well, trying to save it he headed to Port

Análisis Sheffield en inglés



Stanley, but on final approach, when extending the gear, he was advised from the tower that one of the main legs had been hard hit by a 30 mm. projectile, so Arca had no option but to eject, being rescueld from the gelid waters near Port Stanley by an Army Bell 212 helicopter.

The second sections attacked a Royal Navy warship in the Falklands Sound with unknown results, the three Skyhawks returned home uneventfully.

Two days later, on 23rd may, at 12:35 hrs. was launched from Rio Grande a 3.ª Escuadrilla division; the crews were; Lt. Cdr. Castro Fox, Lt. Cdr. Zubizarreta and Lts. Benitez and Oliveira; this later had to abort as during the refuelling session with the FAA KC-130H his probe had frozen and fuel did not reache the tanks. Their objective was naval targets in San Carlos Water. After an uneventful ingress flight, the three remaining A-4Q bombed the frigate HMS Antelope which sustained a bomb hit from the naval aviators, —being also struck by a bomb from a V Brigada Aérea A-4B—, but Lt. Cdr.Zubizarreta bombs hanged-up, returning with them —in place of salvoing them together with the rack (MER)— in order to save both items. The runway at Rio Grande was wet and during landing in a strong crosswind, before engaging the arresting cable, the tire from the left main leg blew up and the Skyhawk started to skid to the left becoming uncontrolably, fearing that the bombs night explode, Zubizarreta ejected, but the parachute did not deployed fully, the Argentine pilot died while being carried to the hospital; ironically the aircraft though seriously damaged, was later repaired and put back into service.

During the following days the 3.ª Escuadrilla carried out several sorties, without suffering more losses of any type.

2.ª ESCUADRILLA AERONAVAL DE CAZA Y ATAQUE

Activated late in 1980, when a group of highly experienced pilots and technicians with the Douglas A-4Q, were sent to France to receive the opportune training in the new Dassult Super Etendards, of which fourteen had been ordered.

On April 2nd. eve, the 2.ª Escuadrilla had five Super Etendards on strength and a similar number of AM.39 Exocet missiles, forming part of the BAN Comandante Espora based 3.ª Escuadra Aeronaval, their pilot complement then was: Lts. Cdrs. Colombo (C.O.), Agotegaray, Curilovic, Francisco and Bedacarratz; Lt. Barraza; Lts. (jg) Mayora, Machetanz and Marlani.

At the start of the South Atlantic crisis some reports suggested that the French technicians who were in Argentina when the conflict broke, remained in the country counselling and heliping the Argentines in special with the Exocet missiles, but this point was denied by French and Argentines alike.

The pilots carried out a rigurous training scheme in order to provide them the highest experience possible in the minimum of time, mainly with flight profiles and attack parameters with the AM. 39 Exocet missile, at the same time flight refuelling operations were practiced with the Fuerza Aérea KC-130H Hercules. Simulated strikes were flown against the Argentine's Navy two Type 42 destroyers, ARA Santísimaa Trinidad and Hércules, some of the pilots in rotation went aboard both ships observing and checking the radar consoles in therir CICs in order to find the best means to approach undetected until the last moment.

By the end of April, four aircraft were deployed to BAN Río Grande, while the fifth (3-A-201), remained grounded to be cannibalized as a source of spares for the small fleet, as France had decreed an embargo on the supply of any type of military equipment to Argentina.

Once deployed in the extremely cold Tierra del Fuego airfield, the 2.ª Escuadrilla pilots started with their orientation flights over the local area. Some trials were performed in order to check if it could be possible that the Super Etendars may operate from Port Stanley's short runway, being clearly shown that with a wet concrete surface, the landing was marginal at best. In fact, this aircraft never operated from Port Stanley during the hostilities.

During the first hours of May 4th., a small group of Royal Navy vessels had been picked-up on radar southeast of Port Stanley by a maritime recce. Lockheed P-2H Neptune from the 1.ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Exploración (2-P-112), which had been launched from Rio Grande at 05:07 hrs.; after checking several times the exact position of the British ships —at the hours clearly explained on the map—, the alarm sounded at Rio Grande, and the two pilots in quick readiness alert, scrambled at 09:40 hrs., formation leader was Lt. Cdr. Bedacarratz in a/c 3-A-202, radio call sign was «Aries», the wingman being Lt. (jg) Mayora in a/c 3-A-203 with call sign «Boina». During the flight to the target area, a Fuerza Aérea Argentina KC-130H Hercules under the command of Lt. Col. Pessana refuelled both Super Etendards.

At 05:07 hrs on 4 May, a Lockheed P-2H Neptune took off from Río Grande on a long range surveillance mission south of the Falklands; two hours later, the elderly aircraft picked-up the Royal Navy destroyer HMS Sheffield, providing the exact position to the Super Etendards which hit her

Some time later contact was established with the Neptune which provided with the last known position, returning to base after having completed its mission, the new data was introduced in the attack computers updating them.

Before entering in the detection range of the British surveillance radars, the Super Etendards dropped down to wave-top level; at the range which Bedacarratz considers the ships will be «painted» by the onboard Agave radars, both aircraft climb to 500 feet, sweeping twice, negative, no contact yet, the Super Etendards again descend to the low level approach; just at 11:00 hrs. they climb again, this time with more fortune, on the screens appear several small and one large echo; both pilots made a last check with the attack computers and after locking the selected target, launch their missiles at about 50 kilometres range, it was 11:04 hrs; without waiting the results, turn 180 degrees returning to Rio Grande.

Seconds later, one of the missiles struck the Royal Navy Type 42 destroyer, HMS Sheffield, while the other fell in the ocean close to the frigate HMS Yarmouth probably deflected by electronic countermeasures.

The 2.ª Escuadrilla section landed at Rio Grande at 12:04 hrs., where they were warmly greeted by their fellow Escuadrilla members and personnel from other units.

On May 23rd., two Super Etendards crewed by Lt. Cdr. Agotegaray and Lt. (jg) Marlani, departed on another Exocet strike, but this time, the reported objectives were not found.

Two days later, an information was received that a large part of the Task Force, had approached more than usual to the northeast of East Falkland, and among the ships there was a carrier, perhaps more.

At 14:30 hrs., Lt. Cdr. Curilovic with the call sign «Tito» and Lt. Barraza with the call sign «Leo» departed Rio Grande, after a long flight which included flight refuelling, the Super Etendards attacked the British ships from the northwest, one of the Exocet missiles struck the containership Atlantic Conveyor at 16:30 hrs. exactly. At the beginning the Argentine pilots thought they had hit HMS Hermes which was relatively near the illfated ship, but due to the intense electronic countermeasures and jamming emissions, the AM.39 was deflected directly to Atlantic Conveyor which did not have provision for these systems, while the second missile fell into the sea.

During the South Atlantic war, the 2.ª Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque deployed to Río Grande, having four machines operational of the five so far delivered, as the fifth, illustrated in this photo, was cannibalized to provide a source of spares to the others due to the embargo of supplies

After a new air refuelling, the 2.ª Escuadrilla aircraft, landed at Rio Grande at 18:20 hrs., having flown more than three thousand kilometres in 3 hours and fifty minutes.

On 30 may, the Super Etendard used their last Exocet in the polemical HMS Invincible attack; the pilots involved were: Lt. Cdr. Francisco and Lt. Cdr. Collavino. This mission is related in full detail in chapter XV.

As a brief resumé and synthesis of the Aviación Naval role during the South Atlantic war, some figures are exposed as it was made with the Fuerza Aérea Argentina chapter.

— The Comando de la Aviación Naval deployed during the war a total of 63 aircraft of all types, fighter/attack, recce., antisubmarine, transport, liason, and helicopters.

— A total of 550 sorties were made. (1)

— Before May 1st., the Fokker F-28s and Lockheed Electras did 34 flights to Port Stanley airfield.

— 13 aircraft were lost, four in combat, two in accidents and seven destroyed or disabled on the ground.

— The Prefectura Naval Escuadrón Aéreo Skyvan and Pumas registered 417 flight hours in search and recce and logistic support, losing one aircraft of each type.

— The Super Etendard destroyed with their Exocets the destroyer HMS Sheffield and the containership Atlantic Conveyor.

— During their attack missions, the A-4Qs shared with the FAA the destruction of the frigates HMS Ardent and Antelope.

(1) From April 3 to June 14 including all types of missions, on the Mainland and the Islands.

Loss of HMS Sheffield Board of Inquiry

OFFICE OF
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, FLEET
NORTHWOOD
MIDDLESEX
HA6 3HP
Northwood 26161 Ext. 488
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00520/2.X

See Distribution

28 May 82

LOSS OF HMS SHEFFIELD - BOARD OF INQUIRY

1. You are to assemble in HMS NELSON at 0900 on Monday 7 June 1982 as a board of inquiry whereof XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX , Royal Navy, is to be the President and hold a full and careful investigation into the circumstances leading to and attending the disablement and later sinking of HMS SHEFFIELD under the Command of Captain J F T G SALT, Royal Navy, between 3 and 11 May 1982, calling before you such witnesses as are necessary and reasonably available to enable you to form correct conclusions.

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2. Specifically you should ascertain and identify by questioning those involved and other available witnesses the matters listed in Annex A. Although the matters in Annex A are significant, they are not intended to be exhaustive and all other areas of inquiry deemed pertinent should be scrutinized.

3. The Commanding Officer, HMS SHEFFIELD's preliminary report is at Annex B.

4. Should any information come to light which the President considers should be communicated urgently to me or to any member of my staff, such information is to be sent by any appropriate manner in anticipation of completion of the inquiry.

5. A list of those on board HMS SHEFFIELD on 4 May 1982 is at Annex C.

6. The inquiry is to be conducted in accordance with the directions contained in QRRN Chapter 23, Appendix 38, and FLAGO 1619.

7. The report of the board is to be accompanied by minutes of evidence, or statements taken, and is to contain an expression of opinion on the degrees of adequacy of personnel, material and procedures.

8. The report is to be signed by each member of the board and is to be forwarded in original and unstapled form. The President is to deliver his report personally and brief me on the principle findings.

9. Shorthand writers will be detailed from the offices of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Flag Officer Plymouth and Flag Officer Portsmouth.

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Annexes:

A. Specimen Matters for Investigation.
B. The Commanding Officer HMS SHEFFIELD's Report dated 26 May 82.
C. List of personnel on board HMS SHEFFIELD on 4 May 82.

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SPECIMEN MATTERS FOR INVESTIGATION

Operational

1. The Task Group Commander's assessment of the threat before the attack.

2. The Task Group Commander's intentions and policies in force at the time of the attack.

3. The Task Group communications plan before the attack.

4. The disposition of the Task Group.

5. The degree of readiness of the Task Group, and the ship, before, during, and after the attack.

6. The ships OPDEF state immediately before the attack.

7. The manning states of operations teams, weapons, propulsion and generation systems, and the locations of personnel.

8. The damage control state and condition immediately before, and at the time of, the attack.

9. The nature and sequence of events before, during and after the attack.

10. The use of countermeasures, including chaff, against the attack.

11. Whether, and how, the ship's weapon systems and sensors were used.

Design/Maintenance

12. The adequacy of the Type 42's weapon and sensor fit and its ability to react to the threat.

13. The adequacy of the damage control and fire fighting organisation, procedures, equipment and training.

14. Any problems arising from the design and layout of Type 42 destroyers and their machinery and equipment, with particular regard to any hazardous materials.

15. The degree of readiness of, and confidence in, all weapons, sensors and communication equipments, including the degree to which standard operator checks and performance servicing logs were used.

16. Any shortcomings in machinery operating procedures.

17. The influence, if any, of the material state of the ship on events.

Environmental

18. The environmental conditions and observed effect on air picture compilation.

19. Any evidence of stress affecting the ship's company before the attack.

20. Any evidence of efficiency being reduced because of seasickness, shortage of sleep, or length of time closed up at action and defence stations, or any other cause.

Training

21. The adequacy or otherwise of individual training and preparation of personnel.

22. The adequacy or otherwise of whole-ship training and preparation of personnel.

Administrative/Medical

23. Whether those trained in First Aid were adequate in numbers and in expertise.

24. Whether First Aid parties were closed up.

25. Whether access to the Sick Bay and First Aid stations was affected by damage.

26. Whether any casualties were treated.

27. Whether any clinical diagnoses of causes of death were established.

28. Whether man-made fibres rather than cotton were worn by personnel, and whether these fibres contributed to burns.

29. Any evidence of toxic fumes arising from electrical cable insulation, plastics, cushions, etc.

30. Any evidence to assist towards the registration of deaths, and towards giving further information to next-of-kin, such as - where each fatal casualty was last seen, his apparent physical condition at that time, and known or conjectured cause and circumstances of death.

Rescue and Salvage

31. Brief narrative of immediate rescue assistance by other ships to HMS SHEFFIELD and her personnel.

32. Brief narrative of taking in tow, and eventual sinking.

33. Summary of equipment, materials, etc salvaged from the ship before she sank.

[redacted]

HMS NELSON
Portsmouth

Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Eastbury Park
Northwood
Middlesex
HA6 3HP

22 July 1982

Sir

1. We have the honour to report that, in accordance with your instructions dated 28 May 82, we have conducted an investigation into the circumstances leading to and attending the disablement, and later sinking, of HMS SHEFFIELD under the command of Captain J F T G SALT, Royal Navy. Our report is attached. Our conclusions and recommendations are at Annexes A and B respectively. Summarised main conclusions and recommendations fall at the end of this covering letter. Our report is generally chronological but is also divided thematically, the principal sections covering Operations, Damage Control and Fire Fighting, Medical and Salvage.

2. A preliminary investigation was carried out by Ship's Officers. Although the Board does not agree with all the conclusions or the analysis leading to them, we found it most helpful.

3. The Board sat in HMS NELSON and was provided with all necessary facilities. Witnesses were called from HM Ships SHEFFIELD, GLASGOW and COVENTRY, together with expert witnesses on ship stability, ventilation, materials, GWS 30 drill and the EXOCET missile. CTG's views were signalled to us. Evidence was taken at Fleet Headquarters and RNH HASLAR.

Situation

4. On Saturday 1 May, the Task Group (TG) commenced operations in the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ). On that first day SHEFFIELD went to Action Stations and State 1, Condition ZULU on numerous occasions at Air Warning YELLOW. However, because radar detection ranges on Argentinian aircraft of some 160 miles were being achieved, and because attacks were made only on the NGS Group inshore, the routine was subsequently modified and Action Stations were delayed until Air Warning RED. SHEFFIELD and others were dogged by what they considered to be ESM induced false alarms, believing that Mirage III radar was being wrongly identified as the AGAVE radar (nicknamed CONDOR) of the Argentinian SUPER ETENDARD (SUPER E). The 2 and 3 May were quiet and the ship settled into a Defence Watch routine. The Air Warning remained YELLOW throughout.

5. CTG and TG ships had been provided with a large amount of intelligence data. On the crucial question of whether Argentinian SUPER Es had Air-to-Air Refuelling and EXOCET (AM 39) capabilities, and hence whether ships were liable to AM 39 attack on 4 May, CTG and SHEFFIELD had much the same information, showing that such an attack was quite possible. However, SHEFFIELD rated the AM 39 danger lower, and the submarine threat higher, than did CTG.

The Attack

6. At the time of the attack, on the afternoon of 4 May, SHEFFIELD was the southerly of three Type 42 destroyers disposed on an Air Defence Screen about 18 miles to the West, up threat, from the main body. The AAWC was in INVINCIBLE and Flag in HERMES. The weather was fair and cool with a calm sea and 2m swell. The ship was in Defence Watches and Damage Control State 2, Condition YANKEE. An overt policy was in force and SHEFFIELD was transmitting on radar, sonar, HF, UHF and SHF.
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7. The raid was first detected on UAA1 by GLASGOW xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, and subsequently gained two 965 contacts at about 40 miles. GLASGOW reported the raid on AAWC HF and AAWC UHF, released it to LINK 10, reporting "ONEX", and called the racket as "CONDOR 245". GLASGOW went to Action Stations and fired Chaff D. Paints had been seen in INVINCIBLE at 50 and 30 miles which correlated with GLASGOW's CONDOR report. CAP were told to investigate but found nothing. The AAWC did not accept GLASGOW's classification of the raid and declared the contacts to be spurious. ZIPPO 4 was not called by the AAWC and Air Warning remained YELLOW. 326

8. At about 15 miles the two attacking SUPER Es swung to starboard away from GLASGOW and towards SHEFFIELD. In SHEFFIELD, UAA1 xxxxxxxxxxx 326
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 33[illegible]
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 84[illegible]
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 84[illegible]
xxxxx Chaff was not fired. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
The raid was not engaged. The ship remained at Defence Stations and in Damage Control State 2, Condition YANKEE. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 338
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9. One missile struck the ship at 2 Deck starboard between the Galley and the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room, (FAMR) and Forward Engine Room, (FER). A possible second missile missed and ditched close by. The Argentinian launch aircraft flew down ship's head, perhaps to observe the results of the attack. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
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Damage Control and Fire Fighting

10. The missile's impact left a 15 feet by 4 feet hole in the ship's side and caused widespread minor shock damage, typically the buckling of doors and collapse of ladders. Evidence indicates that the Warhead did not detonate. There are few reports of shrapnel. Large fires broke out

immediately in the FAMR/FER area. The overwhelming initial impression is of the very rapid spread of acrid black smoke through the centre section of the ship and upwards, as far as the Bridge. This smoke very quickly forced evacuation of the Machinery Control Room, Main Communications Office, HQ1 and the Bridge, followed after a few minutes by the Ops Room and later the complete Forward Section of the ship and the forward superstructure. Missile propellant and burning Dieso from the FAMR Service and Ready Use Tanks were the main sources of this smoke, which was responsible for the early and almost complete loss of the ship's fighting capability. Smoke clearance was unsuccessful forward and only partially successful aft.

11. The Firemain was breached at impact. Pressure was lost immediately and was never restored. Of the four fire pumps, C was probably damaged by shock, it would not start. K had been running, but stopped at impact and would not restart. L similarly stopped at impact, but was restarted. However, attempted isolations were unsuccessful and Firemain continued to discharge overboard through the hole until L Fire Pump subsequently failed. N was defective. The lack of Firemain pressure was crucial, as it removed any real chance of tackling the fires. Fire fighting was largely restricted to external boundary cooling, using portable pumps and buckets, and this had little or no effect on the fires raging within the ship.

12. The fires gained quickly, soon embracing most of H, J and K Sections from 4 to 02 Deck and subsequently spreading forward and aft. Re-entry attempts were made along the starboard 2 Deck passage, and later at 1H Starboard Cabin Flat and at 1J Starboard Access Hatch. These were well briefed, determined attacks by men wearing fearnought suits and BA. but all were beaten back by heat and smoke. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 326 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Rover Gas Turbine pumps performed outstandingly badly.

13. The control of fire fighting and other activity after impact lacked cohesion. No emergency HQ1 was established, it was not clear where Command of the Ship was located, the control of personnel was unco-ordinated and, in particular, inadequate checks were made on which Quarters had been abandoned and which were still closed up.

14. Much external assistance was provided. To port, ARROW did an excellent job of boundary cooling, supplying hoses and general support. Conditions for YARMOUTH, to starboard, were less easy. Both ships' efforts were bedevilled by frequent spurious submarine and torpedo alarms.

15. Twenty Officers and Ratings died. Some personnel, in the Galley area, were killed on impact. Others were asphyxiated, later, either attempting to escape, re-entering the ship or staying at their quarters to try and restore the ship's fighting capability. Twenty-six were injured, all of whom are making a satisfactory recovery.

Abandon Ship and Salvage Attempts

16. At 041750Z there was still no Firemain, the fires were spreading, the Sea Dart Magazine was thought to be at risk and the ship's fighting capability had been largely destroyed. With the tactical situation in mind, the Captain ordered hands to abandon ship. Most climbed over to ARROW, a few went to YARMOUTH by Gemini, some were flown to HERMES.

17. The fires burned fiercely for a further two days. However, SHEFFIELD remained afloat, upright and with an even trim and normal draught. Salvage was attempted, and SHEFFIELD was towed to the edge of the TEZ. Here, in deteriorating weather, she began to ship water through the missile entry hole, developed an increasing list to starboard and eventually, at about 100700Z May, rolled over and sank in position 52°11'S 53°50'W in 1000 fathoms. There was no Towing Crew onboard.

Conclusions

18. HMS SHEFFIELD was lost, together with 20 of her Company, as the result of a single AM 39 hit, starboard side, 2 Deck in J Section. A further 26 of the Ship's Company were injured, mostly suffering burns, shock or smoke inhalation.

[redacted] 838
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air defence net was not manned and the UAA1 [redacted] 844
Chaff C and D were not fired. 826
Neither aircraft nor missile were engaged. The ship did not go to Action Stations.

20. A significant portion of the ship filled, very soon after impact, with thick acrid smoke. This smoke critically hampered fire fighting attempts and control of ship propulsion. It was responsible for the early and virtually complete loss of the ship's fighting capability. Smoke clearance was unsuccessful forward and only partially successful aft.

21. Firemain pressure was lost immediately and was never restored. As a result, fire fighting was largely restricted to external boundary cooling, using portable electrically driven pumps (and buckets), and had little effect on the internal fires which rapidly gained hold of much of H, J and K Sections from 4 Deck up to 02 Deck and subsequently spread forward and aft. Several determined re-entry attempts were made but all were beaten back by heat and smoke.

22. [redacted] 826
A number of Rover Gas Turbine Pumps failed. The ability of some equipment to resist shock damage is suspect.

23. Despite the danger of further attack, protracted fire fighting assistance was provided by YARMOUTH and ARROW. The latter's efforts were particularly determined. Spurious submarine and torpedo alarms prejudiced this assistance.

24. After fighting the fire for nearly four hours, and with the situation deteriorating, and he being convinced that the ship's fighting capability was irremediably destroyed, the Captain ordered hands to abandon ship at about 041750Z. No further lives were lost or injuries incurred. We consider this decision necessary, brave and right.

25. Subsequent salvage attempts were unsuccessful. SHEFFIELD was taken in tow by YARMOUTH and reached the edge of the TEZ. However, at about 100700Z SHEFFIELD rolled over to starboard and sank in position 52°11'S 53°50'W in about 1000 fathoms. There is no serious possibility of compromise of classified material.

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26. There were some shortcomings in the performance [redacted] which contributed to the ship's failure adequately to counter the attack:

[redacted] 838 840 844

[redacted] 838 840 844

29. There were many fine examples of individual bravery in the efforts to save SHEFFIELD. The Board have drawn those of which they are aware to the attention of the Captain. We consider the conduct of the WEO, Lieutenant Commander J S WOODHEAD, Royal Navy and the Computer Room Crew, and of POMEM BRIGGS (all deceased), are particularly praiseworthy.

Recommendations.

30. General. Training and doctrine for defence against sea skimming missiles must highlight the supreme importance of vigilance, and of instant, full reactions on first indication of possible attack.

31. In relation to Type 42 Destroyers

a. Improvements in self defensive capability against the sea skimmer are urgently required.

b. Arrangements for maintenance or restoration of firemain pressure following extensive damage are essential.

c. Methods of preserving the ability to control and fight the ship in dense smoke should be investigated.

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e. Smoke clearance arrangements require review.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servants

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ANNEXES:

A. Conclusions

B. Recommendations

C. Ship's History and Equipment Fit

D. CORPORATE Deployment to TEZ

E. NBCD and Air Defence Training Achieved

F. OPDEFs and Defects

G. Intelligence Assessments

H. Narrative of Attack

J. Analysis of Attack and Response

K. Post Attack Narrative

L. Post Attack Analysis

M. Fire and Materials

N. Salvage Phase - Narrative

P. Salvage Phase - Analysis

Q. Casualties

R. Analysis of Casualties, First Aid and Medical Factors

S. CTG Lessons Learnt

T. List of Witnesses

U. Minutes of Evidence (Separate from Report, in three boxes)

V. CINCFLEET's Directive

W. HMS SHEFFIELD Report (Separate from Report, in 13 volumes)

CONCLUSIONS

ANNEX

The principal conclusions of the Board are:-

1. HMS SHEFFIELD was lost, together with 20 members of her Ship's Company, following a single AM 39 EXOCET hit, on the starboard side, 2 Deck in J Section. Impact was at about 1403Z on 4 May. — H, J, K, L, N, P, Q, R

2. Photographs and verbal evidence indicate that the AM 39 Warhead did not detonate as designed. — L

3. Only one body was recovered. Careful enquiry indicates that the other 19 died on impact or, later, by asphyxiation. There is no possibility that any of these men survived. — Q, R

4. A further 26 of the Ship's Company were injured, mostly suffering burns, shock or smoke inhalation. Only one is still in hospital. He is making a good recovery. The remainder have returned to duty. First aid was very well handled. — Q, R

5. SHEFFIELD's assessment of the threat on 4 May acknowledged the possibility of SUPER E/EXOCET attack, and that such an attack could be at low level. However other types of attack, particularly from submarines, were considered more likely. — G

6. The Commanding Officer was satisfied with the state of the Ship's Training. With the exception of some aspects of Ops Room Training and the GDP Crew, the Board consider the ship's efforts in this respect were commendable. — D, E

7. Although the attitude on board was tense, and no evidence has suggested complacency, some were beginning to get bored and a little frustrated by inactivity. Stress, sea sickness and tiredness were not important factors. — J, R

[redacted] air defence net (AAWC HF) was not manned and UAA1 [redacted] — H, J

9. [redacted] Chaff C and D were not fired. The ship did not go to Action Stations or DC State 1 Condition ZULU. [redacted] — H, J

10. [redacted]. Neither Sea Dart nor 4.5 inch Mk 8 engaged the missile or the firing aircraft. 4.5 inch alarm procedure was not used. — H, J

11. [redacted] Weapons were neither manned nor loaded. They were not able to indicate or engage. — H, J

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12. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
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13. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX J, S

14. If all the right reactions had been taken, very quickly indeed, and in particular if Chaff D had been fired on receipt of the CONDOR racket from GLASGOW, it might just have been possible to frustrate this determined and very professional SUPER E/EXOCET attack. J

15. In any such circumstances the provision of longer warning, as from AEW, must enhance the chances of successful defence. J

16. Some shortcomings in the Type 42's self defence capabilities against such an attack were borne out by the evidence heard. The most important of these are:- J

a. Lack of a Jammer.

b. The very high reliance demanded of a number of operators if a Sea Dart or 4.5 inch versus sea skimmer engagement is to have any chance of success.

c. Lack of a Point Defence System.

d. Inadequate simulator provision, particularly for realistic 909 low target acquisition practice. E

17. A significant portion of the ship filled, extremely quickly, with thick acrid black smoke. Initially, this was caused by unused propellant (RDX/nitrocellulose/nitroglycerine), the combustion products of which include nitric oxide and carbon monoxide, and by Dieso; to which were later added noxious and toxic fire products from furnishings and other combustible materials. K, L, M

18. The smoke critically affected the ensuing struggle to control and save the ship. The Bridge, MCR and HQ1 had to be abandoned soon after impact, followed by the Ops Room, Forward Section Base and Sea Dart Quarters. Forward, smoke clearance measures were not effective. Aft, they were partially successful. K, L, M

19. In a very few minutes, the ship's fighting capability was reduced to a negligible level, largely due to smoke. K, L, M

20. The WEO and Computer Room Crew lost their lives, almost certainly by asphyxiation, following their very brave efforts to bring the ship's weapon systems back into service. Q, R

21. Prior to the attack the firemain was de-isolated. On impact it was breached at J Section, 2 Deck Starboard. Firemain pressure was lost immediately and was never restored. None of the ship's four fixed firefighting pumps (C, K, L, N) were effective after the attack. F, K, L

22. In the absence of firemain pressure, firefighting was largely restricted to boundary cooling, using portable electrically driven pumps (and buckets). This had little effect on the internal fires which rapidly spread through H, J and K Sections, and subsequently intensified, later spreading forward, probably to G Section, and aft, at least to the Hangar, P Section. K, L
N, P

23. Using hoses supplied by portable pumps, and later from ARROW, re-entry attempts were made at 2 Deck Passage Starboard (M and L sections from aft), at 1H Starboard (Officers Cabin Flat) and at 1J (Starboard) Access Hatch. These were well planned, well briefed and determined attempts which were all beaten back by heat and smoke. K, L

24. Other noteworthy firefighting attempts were made at the FAMR Escape Hatch (02 Deck J Section), and through the missile entry hole with hoses passed to the Gemini. K, L

25. Following the early evacuation of HQ1, there was a lack of control and co-ordination both forward and in the ship as a whole. No emergency DC Headquarters was set up. L

26. There were a number of critical deficiencies in Damage Control and firefighting arrangements and equipment. In particular:-

a. Forward escape manholes are too small for passage by men wearing BA.

b. Lack of Upper Deck firefighting equipment dump.

c. No Upper Deck control arrangements or position for fire fighting or Damage Control.

d. Insufficient BA.

e. Lack of alternative CO_2 drench operating positions.

f. Failure of single action doors.

g. Lack of through bulkhead hose connections.

h. Non-availability of smoke for training.

j. No escape hatch from Naval Stores, 3/2H.

Other shortcomings are at Annex L para 49. E, K, L

27. Although wearing an AGR in a smoke filled compartment can give life saving seconds, re-entry to a smoke filled area using AGR is very risky indeed. L, R, S

28. The performance of a number of Rover gas turbine pumps, collected from several ships, was abysmal. Of the five pumps eventually tried onboard SHEFFIELD only one, ex-ARROW, operated successfully. K, L

29. The ability of some important equipment to resist shock damage is suspect. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX . K, L 826

30. The ferocity of the subsequent fire in the Mess and Cabin areas on 1 and 01 Deck, indicates that desirable improvements in habitability have been made at the expense of essential Fire Fighting and Damage Control characteristics. M, N

31. The assistance of YARMOUTH, and particularly of ARROW, in boundary cooling and, in the latter's case, supplying hoses to SHEFFIELD, was determined and demanded a high degree of ship-handling skill. These attempts were seriously prejudiced by a lot of reported sonar contacts and torpedo alarms, all of which are thought to have been spurious. K, L

32. At about 041750Z the Captain considered that:-

a. After some 4 hours firefighting the situation was deteriorating. Internally the ship was burning fiercely in most of H, J and K Sections, and the fire was spreading aft.

b. There was still no firemain pressure.

c. The danger of the Sea Dart Magazine exploding was increasing.

d. ARROW and YARMOUTH were particularly vulnerable to S/M or Air attack while alongside SHEFFIELD.

e. SHEFFIELD's fighting capability was totally and probably irremediably destroyed.

He ordered his Ship's Company to abandon ship. Most climbed over to ARROW, a few went to YARMOUTH by gemini, some were flown to HERMES. K, L

33. The ship continued to burn, fiercely, for two days and some areas were probably still burning for up to five days after the attack. However she remained upright, and at normal trim and draft, until the weather deteriorated on 10 May. N, P

34. On five occasions over the next 4½ days small parties visited SHEFFIELD by helicopter to assess the state of the ship, to salvage particularly important equipment, and to prepare for possible salvage. N, P

35. CTG ordered YARMOUTH to tow SHEFFIELD out of the TEZ, with a view to temporary repairs at South Georgia. The tow was started early on 9 May and did reach the edge of the TEZ. N, P

36. At about 100700Z May, in poor visibility and deteriorating weather, SHEFFIELD took on a distinct list to starboard. This rapdily increased. The tow was slipped and SHEFFIELD sank shortly afterwards, probably with a 90° list to starboard but even trim. The estimated position of sinking is 52°11'S, 53°50'W and depth approximately 1000 fathoms. At the time of sinking there was no towing crew onboard. N, P

37. We consider there is no serious possibility of compromise of documentary or other classified material. We have separately reported on this (Annex N Appendix 2). N, P

38. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
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XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

39. There were some shortcomings in the performance [redacted] which contributed to the ship's failure adequately to counter the attack. [redacted]. There was an unfortunate lack of experience in other [redacted] areas. S38 S40 S44 J, L

[redacted] H, J

[redacted] S38 S40 S44 H, J

[redacted] H, J

[redacted] E, G, J, L

[redacted] S38 S40 S44 K, L

46. There were many fine examples of individual bravery in the attempts to save SHEFFIELD, and the Board have separately drawn the attention of the Commanding Officer to those of which they are aware. Among the most praiseworthy are those who continued to man their quarters, in deteriorating conditions, long after the attack. In this respect we would like particularly to call attention to the conduct of the WEO, the late Lieutenant Commander J S WOODHEAD Royal Navy and the Computer Room Crew (Sub Lieutenant EMLY, ACWEMN TILL, WEA1 EGGINGTON, and WEMN2 WALLIS (all deceased)). K, L

47. Other brave acts which particularly impressed us were the re-entries to the smoke filled areas of the ship, often without BA, to save lives or gear. In this category we consider the conduct of the late POMEM BRIGGS of special note. K, L

48. In both firefighting and subsequent salvage attempts we consider the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy, displayed considerable personal bravery and professional competence.

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K, L 94
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RECOMMENDATIONS | ANNEX A PARA

The principal recommendations of the Board are:-

1. In defence against the sea skimming missile, training and doctrine must stress heavily the importance of:-

a. Constant vigilance by all on watch. 7, 8, 11, 12

b. Not degrading own sensors, eg, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXX 8 S26

c. Instant, full reaction, in accordance with standard tactical doctrine and teaching, on first indication of possible attack. 9, 10, 11

d. The supreme importance of timely firing of Chaff, particularly Chaff D. 9, 14

e. Speedy 909 acquisition, even for the very difficult fast low flyer. 10

2. Improvement of the Type 42's self defensive capability against the sea skimming missile is required urgently. Areas for consideration include provision of a Jammer and a Point Defence System. 16

3. Efforts to simplify, shorten and improve 909 acquisition procedures, particularly for low targets, should be given high priority. 16

4. The provision of a realistic 909 acquisition simulator be investigated. 16

5. Smoke clearance arrangements in Type 42 Destroyers be reviewed. 18, 19

6. Methods of preserving the ability to control and fight the ship, even in heavy smoke, be investigated. 18, 19, 20

7. Facilities to permit escape through smoke filled areas be provided. 3, 17, 27

8. The revised advice to isolate Firemain at Action Stations be confirmed. 21

9. Early consideration be given to the arrangements for maintenance or restoration of Firemain pressure following extensive damage. 21

10. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 26 S26

11. Urgent steps be taken to improve the performance and reliability of Rover Gas Turbine Pumps, or a replacement be provided. 28

12. The susceptibility of all Type 42 equipment to shock damage be tested and remedial action taken where necessary. 21, 29

13. Efforts to reduce the flammability and toxicity of furnishings and other materials should be continued. 17, 30, 33

14. All classified material held on board SHEFFIELD, except that known to have been removed, be written off. 37

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB
Telephone (Direct Dialling) 01-218 7165
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From: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

ENCLOSURE NUMBER 17

S38
S40
S44

Ref: D/NLC/1/9/78/1

Commander in Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex
HA6 3HP

8 December 1982

Sir

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS SHEFFIELD

Reference: 520/237L dated 13 September 1982

1. I am commanded by the Admiralty Board of the Defence Council to inform you that they have taken note of your report and the Board of Inquiry proceedings forwarded under the reference.

2. The Admiralty Board made the following observations:-

a. The up-dating and enhancement of the Type 42 weapon fit including the fitting of a close-in weapon system, is being urgently studied. Progress will depend in part on the availability of dockyard capacity, the requirements for which are being reassessed in the light of changes in the Surface Fleet since Cmnd 8288 was published.

b. Action is also in hand to remedy other equipment deficiencies reported.

c. The factors that contributed to the rapid spread of black toxic smoke have been examined, taking account of the report of a special team from the Marine Technology Board. It has been concluded that in this particular incident the contribution from inflammable cabling, linings and furnishings was not critical having regard to the major effects of the missile break-up and the rupturing of the Dieso fuel tank. Nevertheless it is agreed

/ that the ...

that the questions of habitability and damage control need closer investigation. These and other important lessons are now being incorporated in the latest design work on the Type 23 frigate. So far as possible remedial action will also be taken in existing ships and ships building. When assessing the priorities for expenditure, however, a balance may have to be struck between measures designed to improve survivability in the event of a hit and measures designed to prevent a hit in the first place.

d. Following trials of AEW-fitted helicopters in HMS ILLUSTRIOUS, plans are being developed to provide a capability with converted Sea Kings for each operational CVS.

e. The importance of matching Commanding Officers and Executive Officers to appointments relevant to their experience is fully agreed, and measures to achieve this are being examined.

3. Your Report and the Proceedings have been taken into account in the "Lessons Learned" studies in the Navy Department. The detailed lessons in your Report and the Proceedings are being followed up by the staffs responsible. The Admiralty Board may wish to make further observations when all the lessons from Operation CORPORATE and in the Reports and Boards of Inquiry into the other ship losses have been fully examined.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant

SB
SH
SH

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

OFFICE OF
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, FLEET
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520/237.L

ENCLOSURE 10 NUMBER

Deputy Under Secretary of State (Navy)

13 Sep 82

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO LOSS OF HMS SHEFFIELD IN MAY 1982

References:

A. MOD (NLC)'s D/NLC/1/16/20 dated 29 July 82.
B. CINCFLEET's 520/235.L dated 31 July 82.
C. CINCFLEET's 210/1/38.W (Revised) dated 15 July 82 (to MOD(DCDS)).

1. The official copy of the report of the Board of Inquiry into the loss of HMS SHEFFIELD in May 1982 is forwarded in accordance with References A and B.

2. I fully agree with the Board's conclusions and recommendations. With the benefit of hindsight [redacted] She had been lulled into a false sense of security by the ineffectiveness of previous Argentine air attacks. Her loss was an expensive warning and a foretaste of the real Argentine capability.

3. Air Defence This incident highlights the requirement to supplement medium-range SAM with an appropriate point-defence system in the same ship. It is not sufficient to have the two systems in separate ships when providing defence against sea-skimming missiles.

4. Habitability and Damage Control I am concerned at the general conclusion, arising from most ship damage reports, that in recent years we have improved habitability at the expense of necessary Damage Control characteristics. This aspect must receive further investigation by design authorities as a result of this experience. Annex B to this letter is relevant.

[redacted]

5. [redacted]

[redacted] in all the circumstances I have decided that this is not a case for Court Martial, or other disciplinary or formal administrative proceedings, [redacted]

8. <u>Praise</u>. The conduct of Lieutenant Commander J S WOODHEAD, the Weapons Engineer Officer, and his Computer Room crew, was particularly praiseworthy and appropriate recommendations for recognition have been made separately.

THE REPORT

9. My comments on some of the further action required are in Annex A to this letter. Copies of Annexes K and L of the report have already been passed to the Captain NBCD, HMS EXCELLENT. It is recommended that only extracts from the report dealing solely with Marine Engineering equipment matters should be forwarded to the group drawn from the Defence Scientific Advisory Council who are looking at lessons learned in the area of ship design.

[redacted]

Annexes:

A. Comments on Detailed Recommendations
B. Toxicity of Materials

Enclosures:

1. Board of Inquiry Report (original copy)
2. Summaries of Witnesses' Statements (to MOD (NLC) only)
3. Tape Recordings of Witnesses' Interviews (to MOD (NLC) only)

Information:

Ministry of Defence (for Sec VCNS)
The Flag Officer First Flotilla

E4

ENCLOSURE NUMBER 9

ANNEX A TO
CINCFLEET's 520/237.L
DATED 13 SEP 82

COMMENTS ON ACTION REQUIRED OR TAKEN IN RESPECT OF HMS SHEFFIELD BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORT

1. Each of the recommendations in Annex B of the Board of Inquiry Report requires action. Comments on some of these recommendations are as follows.

2. The need for 'layered' air defence is emphasised. Medium-range SAM must be supplemented by close-range systems; a Point Defence Missile System and close-range gun armament, both independent from any of the Sea Dart control arrangements, would be complementary to each other in this task. (MOD action required).

3. The need for defensive capability, in all types of ship, against the sea-skimming missile has already been stated in CTF 317's "Equipment Lessons Learned" report. (CINCFLEET's 210/1/38.W (Revised) dated 15 July 82 to MOD(DCDS)).

4. The provision of adequate simulation for 909 Low Target acquisition practice is urgently required. (MOD action required).

5. An investigation is required into the effectiveness of resilient mounts on WE equipment, (MOD action).

6. Although the unused missile propellant was a major producer of smoke ther is evidence that significant quantities of noxious and toxic fumes were generated from furnishings and other combustible materials. The conclusion as a result of this experience that desirable improvements in habitability have been made at the expense of essential fire prevention and damage control characteristics is strongly supported. Annex B to this letter also refers. (MOD action required).

7. Only backed or bonded Formica panelling should be left in situ. HMS GLAMORGAN's experience when hit by an Exocet missile on 12 June was that unbacked Formica panelling shattered into razor-sharp fragments from blast and impact, causing several injuries, some serious. This matter is being studied by my staff, but investigation by MOD also is indicated. (Page D-2 para 5 refers).

8. The need for training to operate in conditions of smoke underlines the problem of the current shortage of smoke generators for this purpose. (MOD action required).

9. Although some action has already taken place on the critical Damage Control and firefighting equipment deficiencies listed in the recommendations (Annex B) and in Annex L, investigation and remedial action should continue to be pursued with vigour. (MOD action needed).

10. Action should be taken to enforce a mandatory firefighting PJT for all ranks/rates at present an average of 40% achieve it. This requires action by Naval Secretary in the case of officers, and by the previous establishments in the case of ratings (in most cases this will be within the purview of CINCNAVHOME).

11. MOD(DNSY) and the Cabinet Office have been requested (CINCFLEET's 190/0/29.X(a) dated 4 Aug 82) to take the necessary action to write off the classified material held on board. (Page B-2 para 14 refers).

ACTION WITHIN CINCFLEET'S RESPONSIBILITY

12. Completed Action. The following actions have already been completed:

a. ADAWS 4 Edition 30 Software has reduced 909 acquisition times XXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

b. Degradation of UAA 1 by SCOT transmissions has been reduced significantly by the fitting of filters in UAA1.

c. The practice of operating the firemain de-isolated at action stations arose from a view that this provided maximum back-up for magazine sprays. The SHEFFIELD experience showed that this policy, while providing security against a threat in peacetime which was likely to be internally generated (eg a fire), is inappropriate in action with an external threat. The relevant instruction was changed immediately after the attack on SHEFFIELD. (Page B-1 para 8 refers).

13. Current and Future Action. Current and future action by my staff includes:

a. Trials of an immediate Sea Dart engagement sequence for close-range targets, requiring only a single action by the Missile Gun Director, are currently in progress in HMS NEWCASTLE, as part of a new ADAWS 4 issue.

b. The Marine Engineering recommendations arising from the report are directly within CINCFLEET's area of responsibility, although many are the subject of liaison and follow-up actions with departments concerned.

c. General lessons from this and other boards of inquiry will be included in a compendium report circulated to Flag and Commanding Officers and appropriate training establishments.

d. The specific subject of training and doctrine for defence against sea-skimming missiles will be accentuated in the revision of FOTI 0702, currently being undertaken by my Staff and the Maritime Tactical School.

e. Morphine should be distributed to members of the ship's company in accordance with BR 2170 Volume 2 Chapter 36. Medical Officers in Fleet are being reminded of this requirement. (Page R-1 para 3 refers).

Fuentes de la Armada

Hundimiento Destructor HMS Sheffield

FUENTES DE LA ARMADA ARGENTINA

HUNDIMIENTO DESTRUCTOR HMS SHEFFIELD
4 DE MAYO DE 1982

DESTRUCTOR HMS SHEFFIELD

Durante el proceso de preparación, alistamiento y adiestramiento de los aviones Super Etendard y de sus pilotos y la planificación de las operaciones a realizar, el **Capitán de Navío Jorge Aviador Naval (ARA) Jorge Luis Colombo (Comandante de la Segunda Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Caza y Ataque)** comenta que "*los ingleses habían actualizado especialmente a sus buques de primera línea (caso destructor Sheffield, el primer buque construido de la serie Tipo 42, que para ser modernizado insumió dos años de trabajos intensivos con un presupuesto del orden de los setenta millones de dólares)*".

Se estudiaron las curvas de los radares de los destructores Tipo 42 de la Armada. Los destructores ARA Hércules y ARA Santísima Trinidad proporcionaron la información necesaria. Evidentemente, el sistema de defensa antiaérea más efectivo de los ingleses era igual al propio. Se analizaron entonces todas las características del Sea Dart (misil de defensa de área) temible por su alcance, precisión y velocidad.

Una vez determinados los puntos interesantes del perfil de vuelo, se efectuó la práctica con nuestros destructores. Embarcaron pilotos de la escuadrilla a bordo para observar en las mismas pantallas radar y en los sistemas del buque, el resultado de los ataques. Por supuesto, reunidos con el comandante de los buques y sus oficiales, se dieron los prevuelos correspondientes y se efectuaron los análisis posteriores".

El 19 de abril despegaron de la Base Aeronaval Comandante Espora hacia Río Grande 2 Super Etendard y al día siguiente los hicieron 2 aviones más. La escuadrilla quedó así constituida por 4 Super Etendard y 5 misiles Exocet.

"*El 24 de abril tuvo lugar una reunión con los pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea que volaban operando desde esta Base de la Armada con sus aviones Mirage Dagger. Habían solicitado este prevuelo para que se les relatara como se iban a realizar los ataques de la Aviación Naval con los Super Etendard. Era la primera vez que se le planteaba el requerimiento de atacar unidades de superficie. Se mostraron particularmente interesados en el análisis sobre las capacidades de los radares del enemigo y la forma de evadir su detección*".

"*Los pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea propusieron la posibilidad de una operación conjunta, teniendo en cuenta la capacidad contraérea de sus aviones utilizados como aviones de escolta. Para evaluar tal posibilidad se planificó un vuelo de dos aviones Super Etendard y dos Dagger para el día siguiente. Esta única práctica de un probable escolta aérea nunca llegó a concretarse, porque luego del despegue de los dos aviones Super Etendard, los dos cazas de la Fuerza Aérea que los seguían tuvieron fallas. Uno de ellos no despegó y el otro se volvió a poco de haber despegado por una falla de combustible. A partir de ese momento nunca más se trató la posibilidad de hacer nues-*

tros ataques con escolta proporcionada por aviones de la Fuerza Aérea y de hecho jamás se realizaron. La razón es bien simple: los aviones Super Etendard fundamentaron siempre el éxito de sus ataques en la discreción. Esa discreción significaba la ausencia total de comunicaciones radioeléctricas entre los aviones que ejecutaban los ataques y, más importante todavía, aproximarse al objetivo a gran velocidad, desde muy lejos y a muy baja altura. Las operaciones incluían, además, reabastecimiento en vuelo para efectuar ataques a 500 millas náuticas del continente. Nada de esto era posible con una escolta de aviones de la Fuerza Aérea. Los perfiles de vuelo propios eran sencillamente incompatibles, lo que redundaba en la pérdida total de nuestras dos características operativas más preciadas: la sorpresa y la discreción. Eran al mismo tiempo nuestra mejor defensa, y nos aseguraban la ejecución del ataque sin que el enemigo pudiera lanzar sus aviones o sus misiles para impedir nuestro ataque, o perseguirnos luego".

RELATO DEL ATAQUE (CAPITAN DE NAVIO COLOMBO).

"*Con la posición inicial del enemigo a unas 100 millas al sur de Puerto Argentino y a aproximadamente 380 millas de la Base Aeronaval Río Grande, el Comando de Aviación Naval ordenó el despegue a las 9.45. Despegaron dos aviones con un misil cada uno, para atacar al enemigo en una posición que había sido actualizada a las 9.15 por un avión Neptune explorador de la Armada. A las 10.04 se efectuó la reunión con el avión tanque, y luego de recibir combustible y estando ahora a unas 250 millas del blanco fue comenzada la fase final del ataque.*

A las 10.30 de la mañana, y en medio de condiciones meteorológicas realmente malas debido a los chubascos y blancos de niebla comunes en esta época del año en esas latitudes, lo que hacía disminuir la visibilidad a 1000 metros y el techo a 500 pies (150 metros) los aviones recibieron la posición actualizada del blanco a atacar por el Neptune explorador. Los blancos se encontraban a 115 millas náuticas de esa posición de los aviones, y eran dos buques medianos y uno grande.
A las 11.04 lanzaron simultáneamente los dos aviones sus dos misiles Exocet. En sus pantallas radar habían tenido los blancos, y efectuando el procedimiento practicado tantas veces antes, habían llegado a lanzar sin ser detectados por le enemigo, en óptimas condiciones y a una distancia que aseguraba con un amplio margen el impacto en el blanco. No habían registrado ningún tipo de interferencia electrónica, lo que indicaba una sorpresa total.

Luego del lanzamiento invirtieron su rumbo y a máxima velocidad y siempre en vuelo rasante, se alejaron sin ser molestados. Aterrizaron sin novedad a las 12.10".

Fuente: COLOMBO, Jorge Luis. "Operaciones de aviones navales Super Etendard".En: Boletín del Centro Naval N° 733, octubre – diciembre de 1982. Reeditado en Boletín del Centro Naval N° 754 / 755, julio – diciembre de 1988.

RELATO DEL CONTRAALMIRANTE AVIADOR NAVAL CARLOS A. GACIA BOLL (COMANDANTE DE LA AVIACIÓN NAVAL ARGENTINA 1981 – 1982).

"*El día 4 de mayo desde las 05.00 horas, estaba volando un Neptune, como lo hacían todos los días recorriendo el mar alrededor de Malvinas en búsqueda de naves*

británicas: con ello aseguraban el paso de aviones argentinos desde el continente hacia las islas y viceversa y en caso positivo, proveían de blancos a nuestros aviones de ataque.

A las 07.09 el explorador detectó en su radar un eco a 90 millas de distancia al Sur de Puerto Argentino: con su equipo de contramedias electrónicas, por le tipo de emisiones recibidas determinó que se trataba de un buque enemigo, probablemente del tipo 42.

Dispuse que en Río Grande se alistaran dos Super Etendard para atacar con misiles, y que el Neptune se mantuviera en contacto y ampliara su información
A las 08.20 los Super Etendard habían sido verificados y estaban listos para ser tripulados.

A las 08.45 el Neptune actualizó la posición del enemigo y confirmó que los blancos eran tres: uno grande y dos medianos. Ordené que los Super Etendard despegaran a las 09.45, y al explorador que informara nuevamente la posición del blanco a las 10.00 y se la comunicara a los aviones atacantes.

Los Super Etendard despegaron según lo ordenado. A 150 millas de Río Grande y 15000 pies de altura se reunieron con el avión tanque (un KC – 130 de Fuerza Aérea), completaron sus tanques de combustible e iniciaron la fase final del ataque. Los aviones atacantes iban absolutamente solos, sin ningún tipo de escolta.

Cuando descendieron a ras del agua para evitar la detección enemiga, se encontraron con condiciones meteorológicas adversas: el techo de nubes a 500 pies y la visibilidad muy reducida por chubascos y bancos de niebla.

... a las 10.30 el Neptune logró transmitir a los Super Etendard la situación exacta de los blancos, que ahora eran uno grande y tres medianos. El explorador inició el regreso a su base en Río Grande, donde aterrizó a las 13.04.

Con la nueva posición informada por le Neptune los buque ingleses se encontraban a 115 millas de los Super Etendard (...) localizaron al enemigo en sus radares y lanzaron sendos misiles. Se hallaban a unas 25 millas del blanco y eran las 11.04. Giraron inmediatamente para alejarse de la zona peligrosa y poner rumbo de regreso a Río Grande, donde aterrizaron sin novedades a las 12.04.

Mientras los Super Etendard giraban y los Exocet se desplazaban a dos metros sobre la superficie del mar y a1000 km/h hacia el sentenciado Sheffield, a bordo de este, según narraciones inglesas, el oficial de guardia vigilaba el horizonte para confirmar si un momentáneo contacto radar que instantes antes había obtenido en la central de operaciones podía ser un avión atacante. Estaba mirando hacia proa por estribor, acompañado por uno de los pilotos de helicóptero del buque, cuando percibieron a los lejos una pequeña nube de humo; no acertaron a reconocer de qué se trataba, pero es que ni ellos ni nadie había visto nunca un Exocet de frente a velocidad casi supersónica. Lo identificaron cuando estaba a una milla de distancia, pero no alcanzaron a adoptar medida alguna, porque cuatro segundos después el misil penetró por la banda de estribor, en el centro del buque, a pocos pies por encima de la línea de flotación, hasta la sala de máquinas, donde hizo explosión con una fuerza devastadora que barrió

por delante hasta la central de operaciones y hacia popa hasta la central de control de averías. Los incendios se propagaron rápidamente, y cuatro horas después se ordenó abandonar el buque, que posteriormente se hundió".

Fuente: GARCIA BOLL, Carlos A. "Ataque al Sheffield". En: Boletín del Centro Naval N° 764, primavera 1991.

RELATO DEL ALMIRANTE SANDY WOODWARD (COMANDANTE DEL GRUPO DE TAREAS DEL ATLÁNTICO SUR DURANTE EL CONFLICTO MALVINAS).

"Eran las diez en punto de la mañana del martes 4 de mayo de 1982.

Esa mañana habíamos dispuesto una línea de piquetes compuesta por tres destructores misilísticos del tipo 42, naves más bien pequeñas que desplazaban 4000 toneladas. Alejado a mi derecha (...) se encontraba el HMS Coventry. Hacia mi izquierda estaba el HMS Sheffield... Al centro de encontraba el HMS Glasgow, ubicado de modo de asegurar que los tres buques presentaran un amplio frente defensivo mediante sus misiles superficie – aire.

Mis tres comandantes (...) no ignoraban los riesgos que corrían. Sabían que si un avión ene migo en acercamiento se elevaba rápidamente y obtenía contacto, lo más probable era que el piloto lanzara sus misiles hacia el primer eco que apareciera en su pantalla radar. El Coventry, Glasgow y Sheffield se habían emplazado cuidadosamente, dejándoselos confiados casi exclusivamente en sus sistemas de misiles y autodefensa.
A unas 18 millas (...) se hallaba mi segunda línea de defensa: las fragatas Arrow, Yarmouth y Alacrity, y el grande y viejo destructor Glamorgan. Detrás de ellos quedaban los tres buques auxiliares Olmeda, Resource y Fort Austin, ubicados para aumentar la confusión de los radares enemigos. Solamente a retaguardia de ellos podrían encontrar los Super Etendard a sus blancos apropiados, los portaaviones Hermes e Invincible, pero cada uno de ellos contaba con su propio arquero en forma de una fragata tipo 22. Muy cerca del Invincible estaba el Brillant (...) ; el Hermes tenía al Broadsword... Ambos buques de 4400 toneladas diseñados primordialmente para la guerra antisubmarina, que tenían instalado el notable sistema antimisiles Sea Wolf.

Los dos Super Etendard argentinos se hallaban aproximadamente a 150 millas al oeste de mi fuerza cuando abandoné la central de operaciones del almirante, a bordo del Hermes, para ingerir un almuerzo ligero. El Capitán de Corbeta Bedacarratz y el Teniente de Navío Mayora (los pilotos navales argentinos) entraban en ese preciso instante en la masa de aire despejado que nos rodeaba, y no encontraban inconveniente en volar a ras de las olas. Pasaban por encima de ellos los haces de barrido de los radares británicos de larga distancia, que permanecían ciegos a su penetración de lata velocidad.

A las 14.02 horas los pilotos lanzan sus misiles y giran escarpadamente hacia la izquierda. Ambos Exocet comienzan a caer, enganchados en sus propios blancos. Ninguno de los pilotos tiene la menor idea sobre los buques hacia los que han apuntado, ni van a quedarse allí para averiguarlo. Sólo saben que apareció un contacto radar en sus

pantallas... Y escapan rápidamente, volviendo a picar a ras de las olas, por debajo de nuestros haces de radar, rumbo hacia el oeste.

Nunca volvimos a detectarlos.

Uno de los misiles se dirige hacia el Sheffield, y el otro pasa muy alejado.

... en el puente del Sheffield, los tenientes de navío Peter Walpole y Brian Layshon se hallaban mirando hacia la amura de estribor, cuando avistaron una estela de humo a un par de metros sobre la superficie del mar, a alrededor de una milla de distancia y dirigiéndose directamente hacia el buque.

El Exocet hizo impacto a 14.04 horas. En medio del buque. Costado de estribor. Un par de metros sobre la flotación. Hay ciertas dudas sobre si la carga de combate explotó, pero varios hombres perecieron instantáneamente. Se inició un enorme incendio, despidiéndose grandes cantidades de calor y humo que provocaron otras muertes...

A media tarde, al aumentar el riesgo de que se produjera una gran explosión, el Capitán de Navío Sam Salt (Comandante del Sheffield) *impartió la orden de abandonar el buque, y la tripulación remanente fue trasladada por los helicópteros a las fragatas.*

Mientras tanto, el Sheffield continuaba incendiándose; ya sus planchas de cubierta se habían recalentado mucho, y aparecían por todas partes grandes parches de pintura ampollada. El fuego se lo devoraba lentamente, pero aún no había llegado a la santabárbara. Sam Salt quería ir a verificar la posibilidad de salvarlo. Lo postergué hasta el día siguiente, porque no quise arriesgar un helicóptero ni las vidas de algunos de mis hombres cuando todos sabíamos perfectamente que podía estallar en cualquier momento. Por otra parte, suponiendo que el pobre buque pudiera salvarse, ya estaba tan seriamente averiado que carecía de valor militar, y quizás ni siquiera de chatarra".

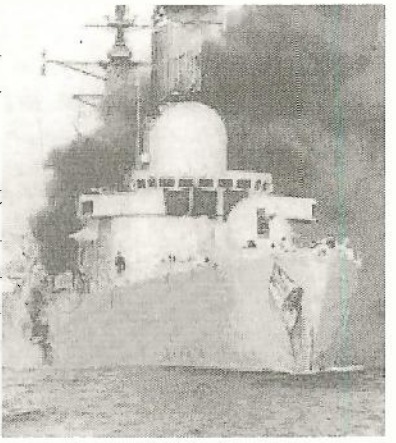
Fuente: WOODWARD, Sandy y ROBINSON, Patrick. "Fue un poco ajustado". En: U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, marzo de 1992. Reproducido y traducido en Boletín del Centro Naval N° 766, abril – junio de 1992.

Fuentes Británicas

HMS Sheffield

FUENTES BRITÁNICAS

The Sheffield



One month earlier HMS Sheffield, a modern computerised Type-42 destroyer, had been returning to Portsmouth from a patrol in the Arabian Gulf, her crew looking forward to some well earned R & R.

She was the second ship to bear the name. The first was a 591ft Southampton Class cruiser that had helped sink the Bismark in WW2, and had a proud battle history. When decommissioned in '67, many of the stainless steel fittings (presented by Sheffield companies, distinct from normal brass fittings) that had given the ship the nickname "Shiny Sheff" were added to the new Sheffield, enduring the name and keeping the distinction.

The call to join the Task Force came within hours of the Argentinean invasion of the islands, and when the crew were just four days from Portsmouth. Some of the crew would never see home again.

On Tuesday May 4th the ship was on forward radar scouting patrol, around 70 miles south and east of Port Stanley. Meanwhile a pair of French made Super-Etenard fighter-bombers from the mainland Argentinean base of Rio Gallegos spotted the HMS Sheffield on radar about 50 km away. The planes headed closer, at 20km fired off a pair of AM 39 Exocet missiles, then peeled off toward home. One of these Exocets locked onto the Sheffield.

These missiles quickly dropped to between six and eight feet from the sea and travelled at close to the speed of sound through rough waves, following a course programmed in by the pilots. 10km from the target the missile's own radar system picked out the target and homed in.

One history of the Falklands war says that as there were no "bogeys" on any radar screens at the time, the officers were making a satellite phone call back to Fleet HQ in England, an action that would jam the use of the ship radar. However, with other ships close by, notably the Carrier Invincible, this was not seen to be a risk. At the end of the call, reported the Guardian newspaper, the radar came back on and the two Etenards were spotted just 33km away. It was the Navy's first encounter with low-flying Exocet-carrying attack planes.

Another history says that the Sheffield's crew were "only in second-degree readiness rather than at full action-stations". The first the crew heard was a loudspeaker warning "Missile Attack - hit the deck". It reportedly took four minutes to close a ship down into battle stations and to be ready to take evasive action. The Sheffield had little more than a minute to react.

One of the missiles missed the target, but the other hit the Sheffield square amidships, penetrating deep into the the electronic fire control room. It apparently failed to explode but ignited everything around it - flames fuelled by the missiles own propellant. It came in low, about six feet above water level, and exploded outward and upward. The whole working area of the ship was in flame and poisonous smoke quickly engulfed the ship. 21 men lost their lives and a further 24 wounded.

One of the men who died was Senior Computer Chief Mike Till, from Houghton-le-Spring , Co Durham. When the missile hit his team stayed at their posts. They were working to get the ships computers back on line so that she might be able to defend herself, unaware that the planes responsible for the attack were long gone. Sadly it was too late for these men to escape the fire, smoke and fumes. Mike and his men all failed to survive.

HM Glamorgan

(D19

1L

HMS Glamorgan (D19)

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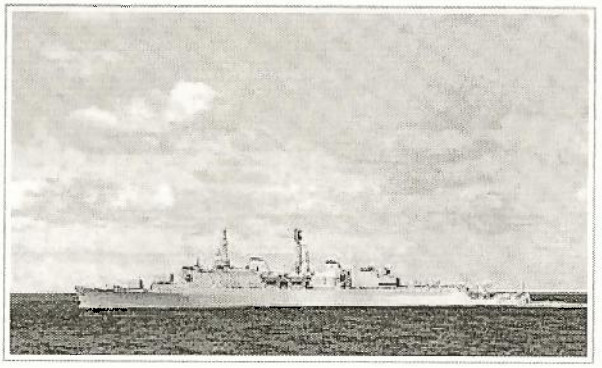
(Redirected from HMS Glamorgan)
Jump to: navigation, search



HMS *Glamorgan*

Career (UK)	
Name:	HMS *Glamorgan*
Builder:	Vickers-Armstrongs
Laid down:	13 September 1962
Launched:	9 July 1964
Commissioned:	11 October 1966
Decommissioned:	1986
Motto:	*I Fyny Bo'r Nod* (Welsh: "I Give Way To None")
Fate:	Sold to Chile on September 1986
Career (Chile)	
Name:	*Almirante Latorre*
Acquired:	September 1986
Commissioned:	1986
Decommissioned:	1998
Fate:	Scrapped and sunk at sea in 2006
General characteristics	

Class and type:	County class destroyer
Displacement:	6,200 tonnes (full load)
Length:	520 feet (160 m)
Beam:	53 feet (16 m)
Draught:	20 feet 5 inches (6.2 m)
Propulsion:	COSAG (Combined steam and gas), two sets of geared steam turbines producing 30,000 s.h.p, 2 shafts
Speed:	30 knots (56 km/h)
Range:	4,000 nautical miles (7,400 km) at 28 knots (52 km/h)
Capacity:	471
Armament:	1 × twin 4.5 inch (114 mm) gun 4 × Exocet missile launchers 2 × mountings for Seacat surface-to-air missiles 2 × Seaslug surface-to-air missile launchers aft 2 × launchers for shipborne torpedoes 2 × Oerlikon 20 mm cannon In Chilean service, Seacat replaced by Barak surface-to-air missile system
Aircraft carried:	1 × Westland Wessex III helicopter

For other ships of the same name, see HMS Glamorgan.

HMS *Glamorgan* (D19) was a County-class destroyer of the Royal Navy. The ship was built by Vickers-Armstrongs in Newcastle Upon Tyne. With a displacement of 5,440 tonnes, *Glamorgan* was named after the Welsh county of Glamorgan. She was launched on June 9, 1964, and was delivered to the Navy two years later. In the mid- 1970s *Glamorgan* had her 'B' turret replaced by four Exocet launchers. In the spring and early summer of 1982 *Glamorgan* was involved in the Falklands War and was badly damaged by an Exocet missile in the last days of the war. She spent many months in late 1982 being refitted, and was back at sea in 1983. Her last active deployment for the Royal Navy was to the coast of Lebanon, assisting British peace-keeping troops there in 1984.

She was decommissioned in 1986 and sold to the Chilean Navy. Under Chilean colours she was renamed *Almirante Latorre*. In 1996, Sea Cat was replaced with the SAM "Barak" system. She served for 12 years until she was decommissioned again in late 1998. In December 2005, the ship was finally sunk, while under tow to be scrapped.[*citation needed*]

Falklands War campaign

Glamorgan

Falklands War campaign

At the start of the Falklands campaign (2 April 1982) *Glamorgan* was already at sea off Gibraltar about to take part in exercises; she was immediately diverted to join the main Royal Navy task force, and served as flagship for Admiral Sandy Woodward during the voyage south. Her most useful armament proved to be her remaining twin 4.5-inch (114 mm) guns, which were used primarily to bombard enemy positions on shore.

Glamorgan was first in action on the evening and night of 1 May when she joined forces with HMS *Arrow* and HMS *Alacrity* to bombard Argentine positions around Port Stanley. The three British ships soon came under attack by Mirage III jets with two 500 lb bombs falling close alongside *Glamorgan* and causing minor underwater damage.

Two weeks later on 14 May she was again in action, this time supporting British special forces on Pebble Island (West Falkland), and for the next two weeks until the end of May she was almost continuously engaged bombarding various shore positions on the east of the islands mainly as part of a plan to distract attention from the landings at San Carlos, but also against the airfield at Port Stanley and in support of British forces ashore. She twice survived unsuccessful Exocet attacks.

At the beginning of June, the task force having been reinforced with other ships, *Glamorgan* was detached to protect shipping in the Towing, Repair and Logistics Area (TRALA), some 200 miles (320 km) away from the islands, but as the campaign reached a climax she was recalled in the evening of 11 June to support the Royal Marines fighting the Battle of Two Sisters.

At 06:37 the following morning, following an intense but ineffective air raid, she was struck by an Exocet missile fired from a shore-based launcher improvised on the back of a lorry trailer. *Glamorgan* was some 18 nautical miles (33 km) off shore at the time and steaming at about 20 knots (37 km/h). Her radar systems failed to detect the incoming missile (which was smaller and faster than anything they had been designed for), so the only warning was a visual contact. Fortunately the ship was moving fast enough to be able to turn rapidly towards from the missile in the few seconds available and the missile struck her port side towards the stern. Turning towards the missile prevented the missile from penetrating the ship's side at right angles (as it was designed to do), it hit the angle of the deck coaming and ricocheted into the hangar, causing the Wessex helicopter to explode and starting a severe fire both in the hangar and in the main galley immediately below. In all thirteen crew members were killed, and a number wounded. The ship was under way again with all fires extinguished by 10:00.

On the following day, repairs were made at sea, and after the Argentinian surrender on 14 June, more extensive repairs were undertaken in the sheltered waters of San Carlos Bay. She sailed for home on 21 June, and re-entered Portsmouth on 10 July 1982 after 104 days at sea.

Roll of Honour

The thirteen sailors killed in action during the Falklands War:

- Lieutenant David H. R. Tinker
- Petty Officer Michael J. Adcock
- Petty Officer Colin P. Vickers
- Cook Brian Easton
- Air Engineering Mechanic Mark Henderson
- Air Engineering Mechanic Brian P. Hinge
- Acting Chief Air Engineering Mechanic David Lee
- Air Engineering Artificer Kelvin I. McCallum
- Cook Brian J. Malcolm
- Marine Engineering Mechanic Terence W. Perkins
- Leading Cook Mark A. Sambles
- Leading Cook Anthony E. Sillence
- Steward John D. Stroud

Ian Inskip

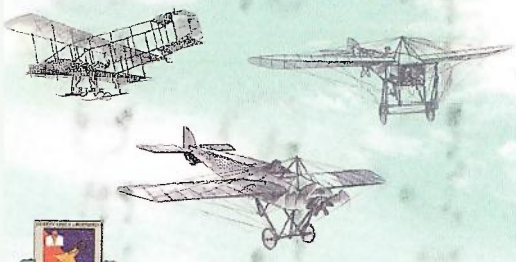
Ordeal By Exocet

HMS Glamorgan And The Falklands War 1982

II CONGRESO DE HISTORIA AERONÁUTICA ARGENTINA

AVIACIÓN MILITAR ARGENTINA

3 al 6 de septiembre de 2012



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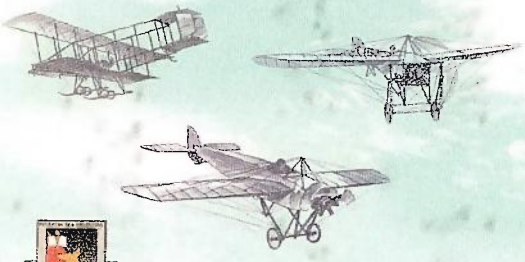

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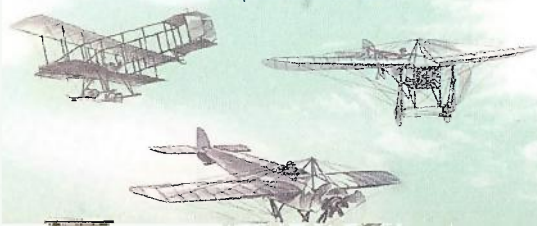

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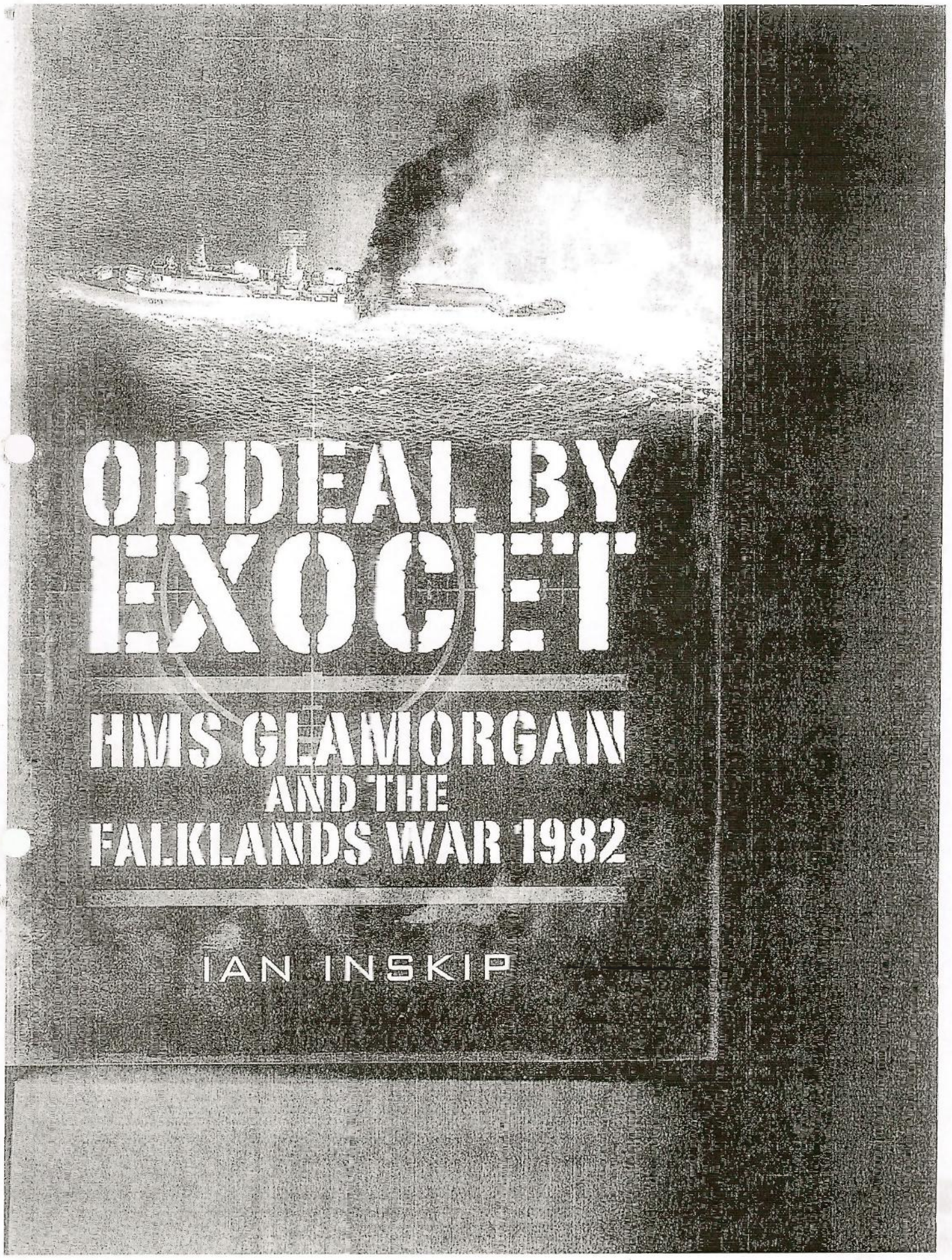

ORDEAL BY EXOCET

HMS GLAMORGAN AND THE FALKLANDS WAR 1982

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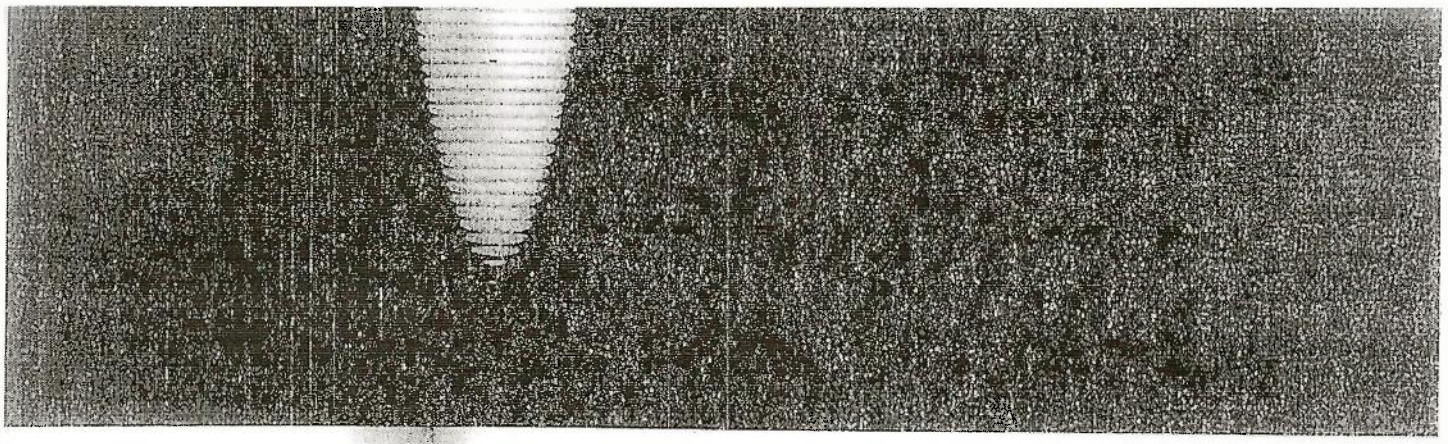


moved forward to Douglas Station, occupied by 45 Commando, with 3 Para in Teal Inlet and 2 Para in Darwin. Overnight a Canberra had managed to bomb the troops at San Carlos and the Argentinians made another attempt to fire Exocet, though a component failed and no missile was fired. It was replaced with a component from a radio. The next time the Argentinians were to attempt a firing, it would be more successful.

In the air, we lost a Puma helicopter to a Pucara, but on the plus side another Pucara had itself been shot down. At 1545, as we were about to replenish from *Tidespring*, a report predicted a Super Etendard raid. Appropriate precautions were taken and we waited for the attack to develop. By 1630, with no attack materialising, we replenished. It went well and with full bunkers, if not completely full stomachs, we detached again for the gun-line. Willie, grounded by a rotor head defect, would not be available for spotting. I was running short of ideas on how to ring the changes.

As we moved inshore, confirmation was received of the capture of Darwin/Goose Green with 900 prisoners, including 120 wounded. The figures demonstrated the intensity of the fighting and the magnitude of 2 Para's victory. A Skyhawk and a Mirage had attacked the AOA at 1800. Rapier claimed the Skyhawk although this kill was not confirmed. We were half way inshore when the evening's sitrep arrived. *Argonaut*, rid of her unexploded bombs, would be coming out of San Carlos whilst we bombarded to the east and *Minerva* was going in to assume fighter controller duties.

Sunday, 30 May

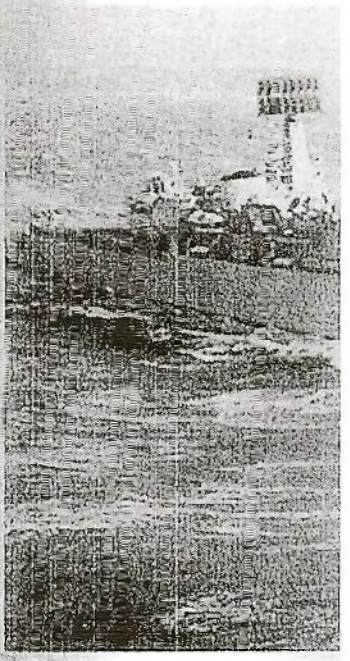
We were on the gun-line at 0315 and were due to support the SAS. However, en route we were informed that Stanley Airport was littered with light aircraft and we were tasked to deal with them. On approaching the airport we came under heavy and accurate fire from the shore batteries; they were getting much better and, unknown to most of the crew below decks, shells were landing within 200 yards. The peace of the night was then shattered by a very loud bang as a 6in howitzer shell landed close aboard. Those below decks may not have known what it was, but they certainly heard it. I had not planned to start the zig-zag for another couple of miles but a very loud bang is an excellent starting pistol. I immediately changed

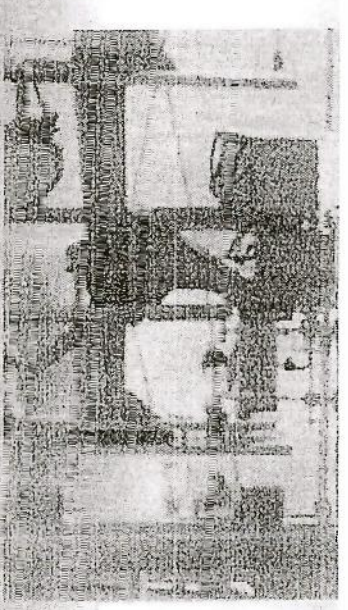
fire control computer (the Box) could be started, and then using spotting corrections to shift targets in lieu of designating new targets to the system, I both saved time and had freedom of manoeuvre. Course and speed were constrained whilst setting up the Box which took about one minute each time, while a spotting correction could be applied in five seconds with no restrictions on manoeuvring. This enabled us to fire seventy-eight rounds, in salvos of six, in very rapid succession, in fact firing so rapidly that the paint on the barrels blistered.

The enemy continued to take exception to our activity but before they could find our range we were racing away from Stanley, keeping up a spirited zig-zag. When about eleven miles from the airport, we launched another Seaslug. The arrival of the missile was announced by a brilliant flash as the fireball erupted across the airfield. Having liberally spread shrapnel about as tasked, we retired gracefully to our designated gun-line to await the arrival of *Ambuscade* who arrived at 0345 and prepared to bombard around Stanley airfield. Whilst she went inshore, we engaged the gun emplacements on Sapper Hill to distract the opposition. In the process the right hoist jammed, so we were only firing from the left gun, but at least we could fire. Such are advantages of twin barrels. We quickly managed to clear the jam but it was a waste of time; *Ambuscade* only managed to get one round away before her gun broke down.

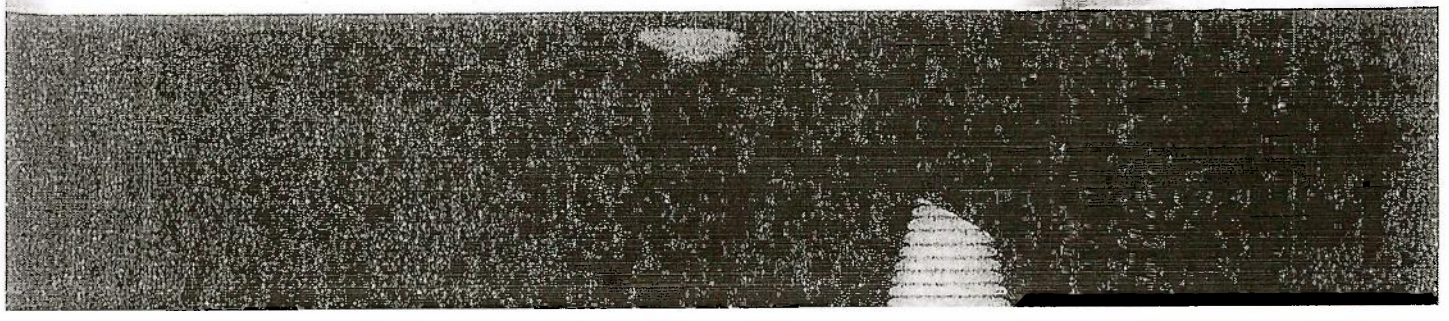
The Mark 8 gun in the newer ships was not as reliable as the older Mark 6 version which we carried but our gun had a further advantage when it came to bombardment. Whereas the Mark 8 would place shells in a very tight pattern, the Mark 6 tended to spread them about. When firing five or ten rounds, one wanted to blanket an area rather than land shells in the same place. The one big advantage of the Mark 8 was its greater effective range, some 3,000 yards more.

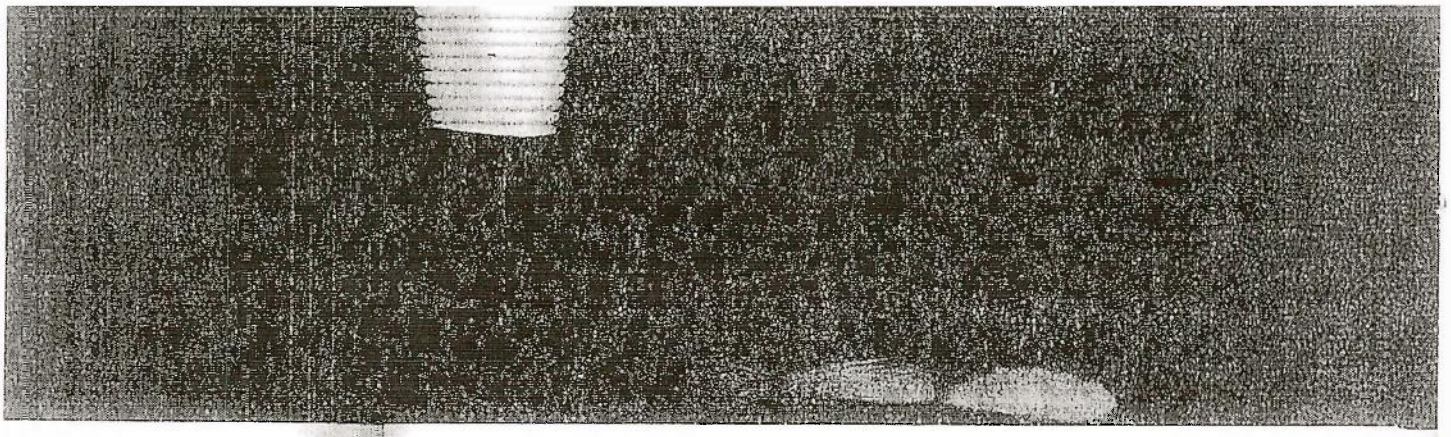
We reverted to enhanced defence stations as we waited on the gun-line. It gave people some chance to stand down as the night passed away. *Ambuscade* eventually laid down another eighty rounds on the airport to re-affirm the notion in Argentinian minds that Stanley Airport remained too dangerous to use. With no further calls for fire, we withdrew at 0730. The spotter had asked if we could remain until sunrise for more firings but we politely informed him that this was not possible because we left a large gap in the carrier screen which had to be filled by dawn.





Top: HMS *Glamorgan* off Portland principal long-range anti-aircraft we





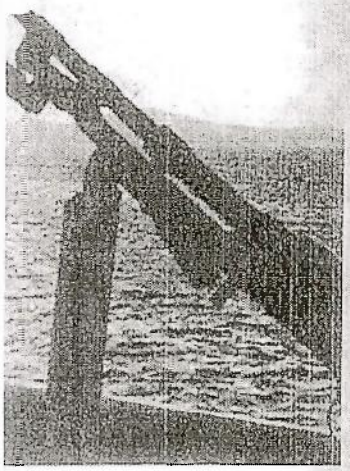
John Smith described his land-based view: 'A very noisy night indeed. Naval bombardment ... continued without let-up for five hours. They seemed to be aiming at saturating the area between Moody Brook and the Airport. The occasional few shells passed over the house.' Whilst we had been keeping the enemy occupied, *Argonaut*, with only one operational boiler, cleared San Carlos and rejoined the battle group.

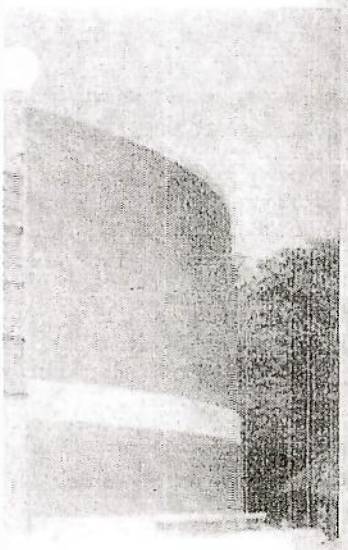
Meanwhile, the Argentinians had been improvising again, rolling bombs out of the back of a Hercules, transforming the long-range transport into a long-range bomber, and they bombed *British Wye*, but missed. The Hercules, with a range of 1,800 miles, suddenly put the auxiliaries in a dangerous position. Someone would now have to look after the undefended STUFT (ship taken up from trade).

We rejoined the the battle group at dawn, having breakfasted and completed our personal domestic routines. In a near gale, conditions looked unpleasant for a replenishment due that afternoon. *Olna* was yawing heavily, making it very difficult to hold distance and position though our crew, despite their fatigue, were becoming ever more proficient at replenishment in poor conditions. Upper deck drill was down to a slick art and made it look easy to the casual observer. In the machinery control room, rapid and accurate responses were made to changes in ordered revolutions. On the bridge, the helmsman maintained an accurate course. I ignored relative aspect, relying upon true bearings, monitoring the gap between the sterns when altering course, and closely watching the waves. We slowly climbed up them before racing down the other side with the two ships rarely in sync. Teamwork was everything and whilst replenishment was in progress, the warfare teams remained alert for the enemy.

On completion of fuelling, we were ordered to remain with the carrier battle group until 1730 before proceeding to the tug and repair area (TARA) to provide support and conduct some long-overdue maintenance on both machinery and men. The crew were, in a word, exhausted after a full month of high intensity activity by day and night. Most of our machinery was working but a number of significant defects needed urgent attention.

At 1730 we detached for the TARA. Five minutes later the dreaded cry 'Handbrake' came over the intercom. The ship went to action stations and we immediately reversed course to regain our original





ction) *Above:* The Falkland Islands

ensued as we hosepiped shells all over the Southern Ocean. The Argentinians had one last remaining air-launched Exocet carried by a Super Etendard which on this occasion was escorted by four Skyhawks. The approach was made from the east after flying around the theatre of operations to achieve surprise. They found an echo at pop-up in the expected spot and the pilot fired with the escorting fighters carrying on in just behind the missile. Two fighters were shot down.

From our perspective, we believed at the time that there were certainly two attacking aircraft and it was certain that one, and probably two, Exocet missiles had been fired, but, in fact, there was only ever one. A Lynx reported a smoke trail coming in our direction and we increased speed and pointed the threat. I sighted the smoke trail fine on the starboard bow and immediately turned the ship to point the smoke, informing the ops room of this sighting and that I had turned towards this threat. By estimating the missile's inclination and range, I determined that on its current course it would pass about half a mile away, but this was still in view of the missile's seeker head. If it detected us, it would turn towards us and probably hit. Racing up wind we were once again the expendable escort protecting the high value units.

As our speed increased our bows slammed into a milestone, shipping it green over the bridge. 'Where is it? Where is it?' screamed Greg Gilchrist the Principal Warfare Officer. 'I cannot see for the moment, the bridge is obscured by a goffer!' I replied. The view from the bridge windows was dark green! The green changed to white as the bridge window wipers strove to clear the water. Once the glass was clear I put my binoculars onto the threat bearing and trained slowly right. I saw nothing. If the missile was no longer in sight, fine on the bow, it meant that it was not coming for us and *Glamorgan*'s luck was holding. Greg Gilchrist was more pessimistic, piping 'Brace! Brace! Brace!' Throughout the ship, fully aware that we were under Exocet attack, people threw themselves to the deck, probably hoping that the missile would neither find them nor the Seaslug main missile magazine.

Even on the bridge people threw themselves to the deck. I immediately ordered them back to their feet and 'eyes outboard'. If the missile was still coming, the sooner we saw it the better. On the lower bridge Petty Officer Alan Carlisle threw himself onto the deck, closely followed by Martin Culverwell, the padre, who landed on top of Alan. Martin remarked, 'Alan, you will not get any nearer to God than you are now!' They both laughed and it helped ease the tension of the moment.

There are places to
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Petty Officer Keith

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Mechanician Roger T

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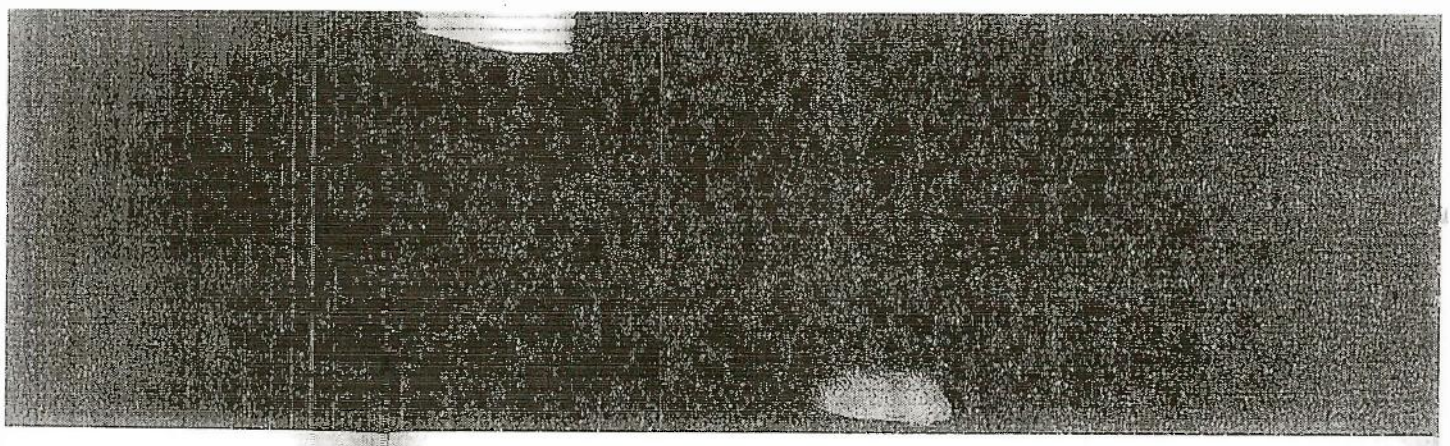

There are places to throw yourself on the deck, and places to avoid. In the transmitting station, one of the places to avoid is the gun foot push trigger. Unfortunately, one member of the transmitting station crew threw himself on the trigger and the firing pulse went to the gun which fired. At this stage I was not concerned since one of our standard drills was to hosepipe shells down the bearing. This was probably more for morale rather than any expectation that a shell splash would down the incoming missile.

In the turret, when the firing pulse came through, Petty Officer Allen, the captain of the gunhouse, ordered another shell in the breech. He knew the hosepipe drill; if a missile was coming our way, a new shell would replace the one just fired as soon as the gun had recovered from its recoil. The turret, still in local control and not auto, wandered to starboard as more shells were fired. We began firing towards the main body. Seeing the danger I pressed the check fire bell, piping, 'check, check, check!' In the transmitting station, the individual lying on the trigger did not realise that he was firing the gun while in the gunhouse, the continued firing pulse was reason enough to reload. High explosive shells continued to hosepipe to starboard, two falling short of an LSL (landing ship logistic). These shell splashes were reported by the gun direction platform as 'missile splashed' and this, and my continued exhortations to check fire, eventually had the desired effect and our smoking guns fell silent.

Petty Officer Keith Balston recorded,

> Exocet heading for the ship, 'Brace, Brace, Brace'. Oh my God! We are done for. We are all lying spread-eagled on the deck waiting for the worst. Several minutes pass. Apparently chaff saved us, quick reaction from the ops room and by the bridge putting the missile on ship's head. The missile splashed into the sea. We are lucky once again.

Mechanician Roger Tipton similarly wrote,

> Brace, Brace, Brace called!! ... Thirty seconds had elapsed until the ship was released - it seemed like thirty years! I had not reached my action station and was caught amidships on the starboard side. My over-riding thought was that I was just about where the missile [illegible] *Sheffield* [illegible] starboard side. The call

> from being hit. It is supposed to give you a chance to get on the deck and hang onto something. The snag is, if one is below, one does not know what it is that is coming or where it is aimed. In this case we knew it was an Exocet, which made it worse for me as they go for the largest radar reflection, i.e. the middle of the ship!

Petty Officer Wiltshire summed up the action in his usual colourful style,

> We came so close, it was ... frightening. These close shaves are making me feel very old! ... fell out from action stations. I zoom off to the mess, grab a tot glass and pour myself three stiff whiskies. 'Ah, that is much better, good old Grouse!' Everyone around me sighs with big relief.

There were other amusing incidents that occurred as a result of Greg Gilchrist's broadcast to brace. Shortly before the attack, Chief Petty Officer 'Hissing' Sid Scott was on his rounds checking the air conditioning plants and was out of earshot of the tannoy when 'Brace' was piped. He came nonchalantly round the corner into the junior ratings' dining hall to see all the section base crew braced in a big heap on the deck. His look of horror was only fleetingly caught as he managed to get to the bottom of the pile in one move.

Trying to establish what had actually happened in this spirited and confused action would take time. *Ambuscade* was justifiably credited for obtaining the initial detection of the Handbrake racket and the chaff countermeasures worked very well. It was a failure for Argentina who expended their last air-launched Exocet and a success for the carrier battle group who downed two Skyhawks. One Skyhawk had attempted to bomb *Avenger*. The bomb missed, hit the sea, and the splash brought down the releasing Skyhawk.

The whole incident from start to finish lasted five minutes. With the raid over, we once again detached for the relative safety of the tug and repair area. Our first task, replenishing stores from *Fort Austin*, took three hours. Five words - hail, gale, cold, dark and rough - summed up a foul replenishment.

Monday, 31 May

At 0100, I finally made my way below for some hot soup and a long overdue hot shower. My hands had become so cold that they had

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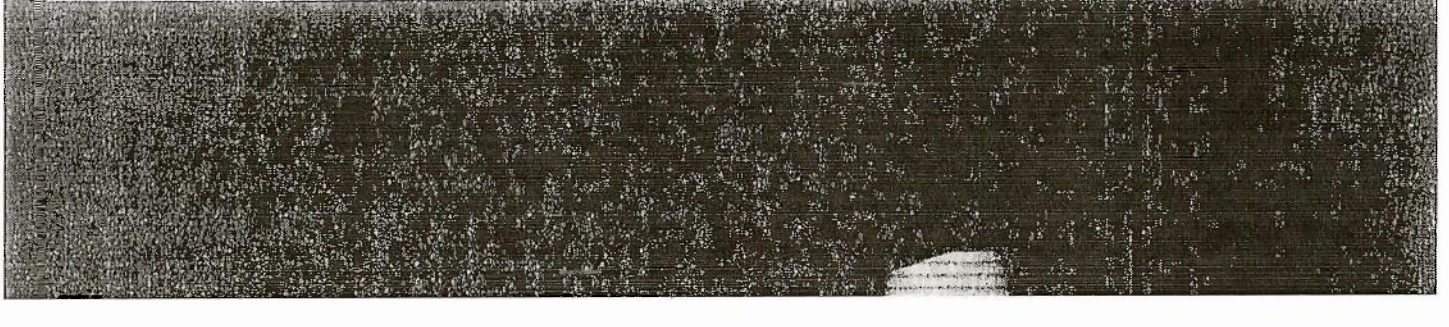

Buenos Aires Herald

Two Harriers downed

FLORIDA 142
BUENOS AIRES

Buenos Aires Herald

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Two Harriers downed

Argentine jet sinks 'Sheffield'

THE BRITISH destroyer "Sheffield" sank yesterday after being hit by an Argentine missile as the local government announced two British Harrier jump jets had been downed during an attack on the Malvinas islands.

The type 42 British guided missile destroyer went down 24 hours after the sinking of the Argentine cruiser "Belgrano" which was hit on Sunday by a British nuclear-powered submarine's torpedoes.

The HMS Sheffield, similar to the Argentine Navy's "Hercules" and "Santísima Trinidad," was apparently shot from a distance of over 20 nautical miles (over 36 kilometres) by an Argentine Navy Super-Etendard French-made aircraft.

Sources in London were quoted as saying the Exocet sea-sea 38 missile launched from the Argentine plane hit the Sheffield's control room.

British Defence Minister John Nott said in London that up to 30 out of 280 crewmen may have died in the sinking.

The French-designed Exocet is a sea-skimming missile guided by a radar system as it flies towards its target at about three metres above sea level.

Shipboard versions of the 18,000-dollar missile are in use on both sides of the Malvinas islands conflict.

"It is a very nasty little weapon that once launched is extremely difficult to stop," a British defence analyst said.

The Sheffield, which cost 23.2 million pounds to build and was launched in 1971, was one of five destroyers despatched with the British task force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff announced yesterday afternoon that two out of three Harrier planes attacking Port Darwin, in the centre of Soledad island in the Malvinas, had been shot down by Argentine anti-aircraft fire.

The high command added that "there were no casualties or losses" on the Argentine side as a result of the aborted attack.

The British government acknowledged the loss of one Sea Harrier and the death of its pilot. (NA-DYN-UP-Reuters)

• The HMS Sheffield of the royal navy. The guided missile destroyer, which was sunk yesterday by a missile from an Argentine aircraft, is similar to Argentina's Santísima Trinidad and Hercules destroyers. (UP file photo)

Thatcher 'devastated'

BRITISH Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, "devastated" by the sinking of the "Sheffield," held an urgent meeting late yesterday with her war cabinet.

Government sources said Mrs Thatcher was "devastated" by the missile attack and loss of the modern destroyer and at least 30 British lives.

The war cabinet is composed of Foreign Secretary Francis Pym, Defence Secretary John Nott and Home Secretary William Whitelaw.

Nott told a packed House of Commons of the sinking and vowed: "The task force will continue with its operations as planned."

Mrs Thatcher, dressed in black, sat sombrely on the government front bench while Nott made his statement.

The sinking brought mixed reactions from British politicians. Labour leader Michael Foot called the news "grave and tragic" and other left-wing Labourites said it confirmed their worst predictions.

Before the news of the sinking, Mrs Thatcher faced some of the most strident attacks on her hard-line handling of the conflict.

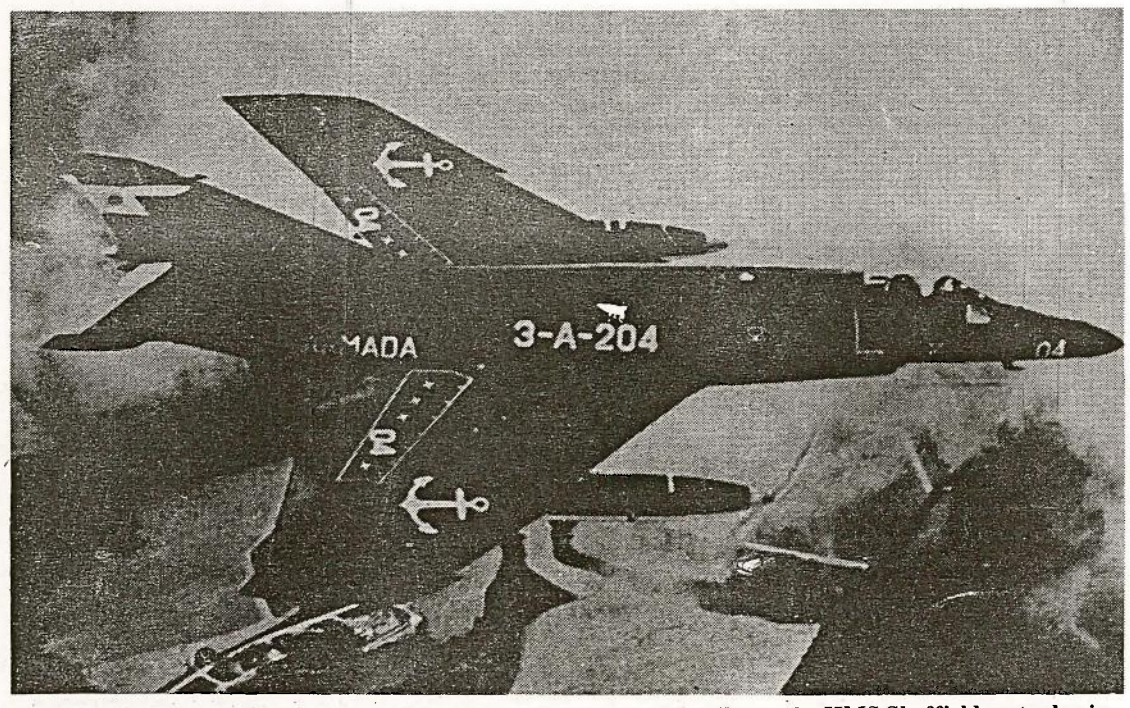
Lord Jenkins, a Socialist peer, accused the Conservative government of "committing mass murder on the high seas" by sinking the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano outside the 200-mile British blockade zone of the islands.

Sir Nigel Fisher, a Conservative member of Parliament, had reservations about the sinking of the Belgrano. "Hitherto we have had total world support," he said. "Now we are beginning to risk losing it."

Roberto Cryer, vice-chairman of Labour's defence committee, said the escalation of British military action was well outside the terms of UN resolution 502, passed the day after Argentine forces moved onto the islands on April 2, calling for a cessation of hostilities, immediate Argentine withdrawal from the islands, and a peaceful settlement of the dispute. (UP-Reuters)

Navy base numbers

THE COMMAND of the Puerto Belgrano naval base announced yesterday that people seeking information concerning the crew of the cruiser "General Belgrano" should call the following telephone numbers: 091 (direct-dial) 80-639 or 80-360. These numbers correspond to the Puerto Belgrano officer training school. (NA)



• File photo of the Super Etendart jet which made a successful strike on the HMS Sheffield yesterday in an encounter somewhere between the Malvinas islands and the Argentine mainland. (DYN photo)

Ireland drops its backing for Britain

IRELAND yesterday asked the UN Security Council to seek a ceasefire in the Malvinas islands war, declared its opposition to European Common Market sanctions against Argentina, and informed the Argentine government it was officially dropping its support of Britain in favour of a position of neutrality.

Saying it was "appalled" by "what amounts to open war between Argentina and Great Britain in the South Atlantic," the Irish government requested the immediate intervention of the UN to end hostilities in the Malvinas dispute.

The Irish government also said it wants the 10 members European Economic Community to withdraw sanctions imposed on Argentina in support of Britain. It thus became the first Western European government to break with Common Market support of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's position on the conflict. **(Continued on back page)**

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• An Argentine anti-aircraft gunner operating a 40mm Bofors on a navy gunboat somewhere in the Beagle Channel. (NA photo)

Flurry of meetings at UN

New York

THE United Nations began playing a larger role in seeking a peaceful settlement to the Malvinas dispute between Argentina and Great Britain yesterday as Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar met with officials from both nations.

Perez de Cuellar also expressed "profound concern" at the British attack on the Malvinas on Saturday together with the Chinese president of the UN Security Council, Ambassador Ling Qing.

He met Ling Qing after a two-hour meeting with a UN group he established to produce contingency plans should the UN become involved in any solution to the dispute.

The secretary general first met with Argentina's Ambassador to the UN, Eduardo Roca, who said that Argentina was willing to stand by Security Council resolution 502 calling for an end to the hostilities in the South Atlantic, but only as this did not signify a return to the colonial situation prior to Argentina's occupation of the Malvinas on April 2.

But Roca said that Argentina had not asked for a meeting of the Security Council and that any hope of the UN playing a mediating role in the conflict depended to a large extent on Britain's attitude in the conflict.

Perez de Cuellar dined late last night with British Foreign Secretary Francis Pym at the New York residence of Britain's ambassador to the UN, Sir Anthony Parsons.

"As far as Britain is concerned the door for a peaceful settlement is still open and it goes in conjunction with the pressure that we have been applying from the outset," said Pym.

Pym pushed aside all inquires on what forms of assitantce Britain was seeking from the US.

"I have not come here with a shopping list," he said.(UP-NA-Reuters)

Hermes, Belgrano hit?

Argentina slams US for escalation

ARGENTINA last night accused the United States of accelerating its armed conflict with Greatr Britain over the Malvinas islands.

In a note of protest delivered to the State Department, the Argentine government maintained that the US rejection of its request for clarification of US President Ronal Reagan's eleventh-hour peace proposal "has accelerated the confrontation with Great Britain for the Malvinas islands."

"This attitude on the part of the United States will leave deep footprints in Argentine-US relations," said the protest, which was delivered to the State Department in Washington by Argentine Ambassador Esteban Tacaks.

Meanwhile, at the battlefront, the British fleet, badly beaten in its attack on the Malvinas on Saturday, was reported to be momentarily moving away from the islands yesterday.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff early this morning confirmed that a British submarine had torpedoed the Argentine cruiser "General Belgrano", causing unspecified damage. It added that the attack occurred south east of the "Isla de los Estados".

Meanwhile, the British flagship Hermes was reported slowly heading southeast with bad damages on its deck in the direction of the South Georgias.

Despite this, in communique 14 released after 11pm by the Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday, the Hermes was not included in the list of ships reached by Argentine fire on Saturday.

The reports held that the British aircraft carrier had suffered severe damage on its flight deck when a Sea Harrier jet made a crash landing on it.

The crash apparently damaged another two Harriers on deck and started a fire.

It is not known if the accident occurred because of a miscalculation or because the plane had been hit by Argentine fire and was therefore unmanageable when brought in for landing.

According to the sources, the Hermes was travelling towards the South Georgias at only five knots, well below its cruising speed.

It was also learnt yesterday that Saturday's attack on Puerto Argentino was launched by seven frigates, the Brilliant, Broadsword, the Arrow, the Alacrity, Antelope, Plymouth and Yarmouth.

The last attack took place at 9pm, just as President Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri was about to make his address to the nation, which explains why his speech was delayed.

A military source also said that the damage done to the Puerto Argentino airstrip in the attack was slight and that it had already been repaired.

Also yesterday, President Galtieri sent warm greetings to the military governor of the islands, General Mario Benjamin Menendez, congratulating him and his personnel on the defeat of the British attackers on the Malvinas on Saturday.(NA)

Thatcher talks offer rejected by Labour

London

BRITISH Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher received a political rebuff from the opposition last night amid a lull in the military conflict with Argentina over the Malvinas islands.

Opposition Labour Party leader Michael Foot rejected an offer from Mrs Thatcher to take part in confidential all-party talks on the crisis.

Foot responded with a firm "thanks but no thanks," thus leaving him free to criticize and to keep pressing for a diplomatic solution to the conflict over the South Atlantic islands taken by Argentine forces a month ago.

Political sources said Mrs Thatcher may now cancel the all-party briefings, even though her invitation had already been accepted by Liberal Party leader David Steel and the Social Democratic parliamentary leader David Owen.

Mrs Thatcher conferred with her "war cabinet" and key advisers to discuss the latest military and diplomatic efforts.

Meanwhile, the defence ministry reported no fighting around the islands after fierce air battles and bombardments yesterday.

"Anything can happen," said a close aide of Mrs Thatcher after the meeting at her official country residence of Chequers, outside London. (Reuters)

Belaunde announces ceasefire plan

Lima

HOPES of a peaceful settlement to the Malvinas dispute between Argentina and Great Britain rose last night when Peruvian President Fernando Belaunde Terry called a press conference here to announce that a seven-point cease-fire agreement was about to be signed by the two nations.

"Negotiations are under way that shortly could reestablish peace in the South Atlantic," Belaunde Terry said. "There is good will on both sides."

The president said that the plan was drawn up by US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, who transmitted it to Peru. After making certain changes, Peru transmitted the plan to Argentina, Belaunde Terry said. The plan was being considered by British Foreign Secretary, Alexander Haig and Argentine President Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, he maintained.

But government sources in Buenos Aires refused to comment on the Peruvian proposal. In London, a spokesman for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's office said he knew nothing of the reported negotiations. In Washington, a State Department spokesman admitted that Haig had phoned Belaunde Terry on the seven-point plan, but said there had not been agreement on anything yet.

"The secretary of state has been in touch with President Belaunde and with Foreign Secretary Pym in recent hours and a number of ideas have been exchanged, but there is no agreement on anything," the spokesman said.

Belaunde said the plan represents a capitulation for neither side. He said it respected "the dignity of both countries."(UP-Reuters-NA)

Fighting deplored by Pope

Vatican City

POPE John Paul, deploring that Britain and Argentina had joined battle despite his appeals for peace, warned yesterday of the wider repercussions of armed conflict over the Malvinas islands.

"What we prayed would not happen is now a reality," he told a crowd of 60,000 pilgrims and visitors in St Peter's square.

"Two great noble and dear countries, Argentina and Great Britain, have started in the South Atlantic a military confrontation which seems to be worsening all the time."

Pope John Paul said it was a matter of pain and concern that lives might be sacrificed and that a rift between the two countries threatened to deepen.

But the conflict could also have repercussions on a wider scale, the pontiff added.

He said he was particularly concerned that the outbreak of hostilities in the South Atlantic could set back the search for peace in other parts of the globe.

He asked how humanity could still believe in the possibilities of peace when a relatively limited conflict threatened to involve other countries or even blocs of nations. (Reuters)

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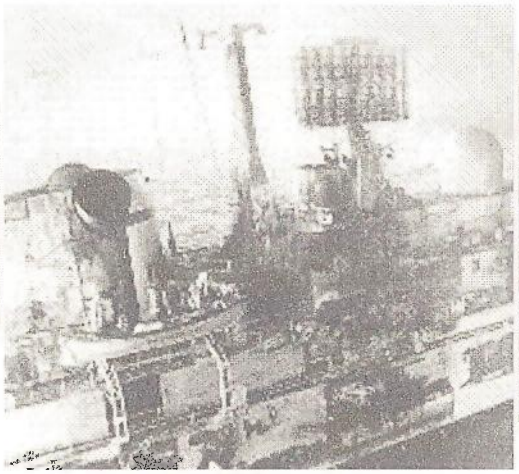

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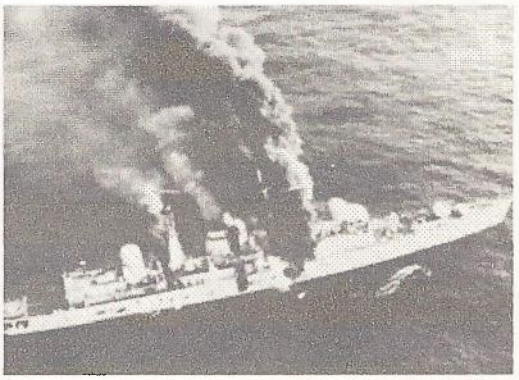

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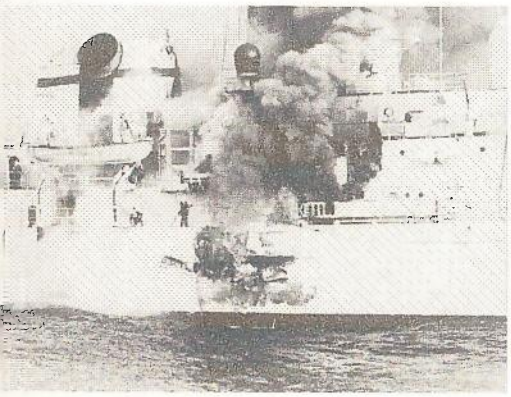

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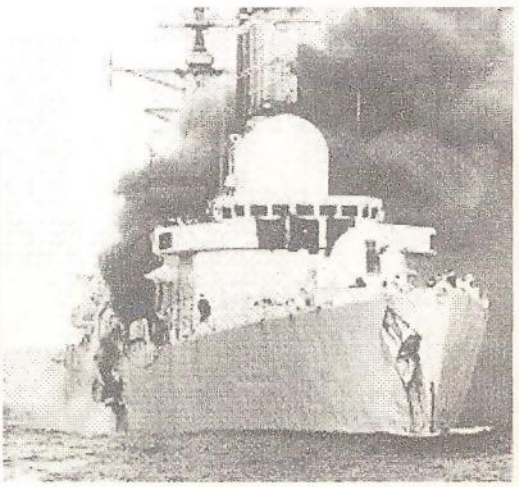

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SHEFFIELD2.jpg

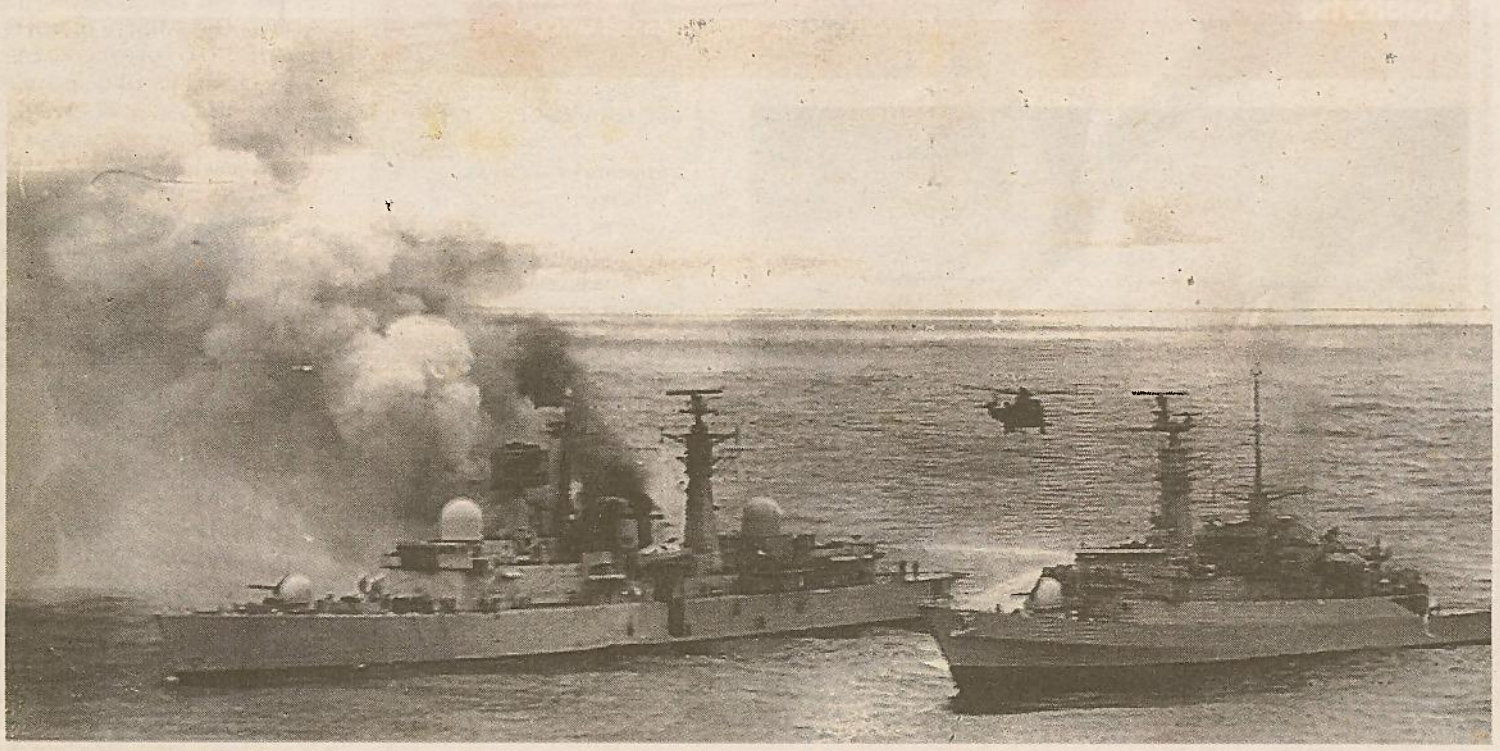
CLARÍN

Crece la polémica por el Destructor Sheffield.

Dos cartas de Com. Aranda al Sr. Alberto Amato

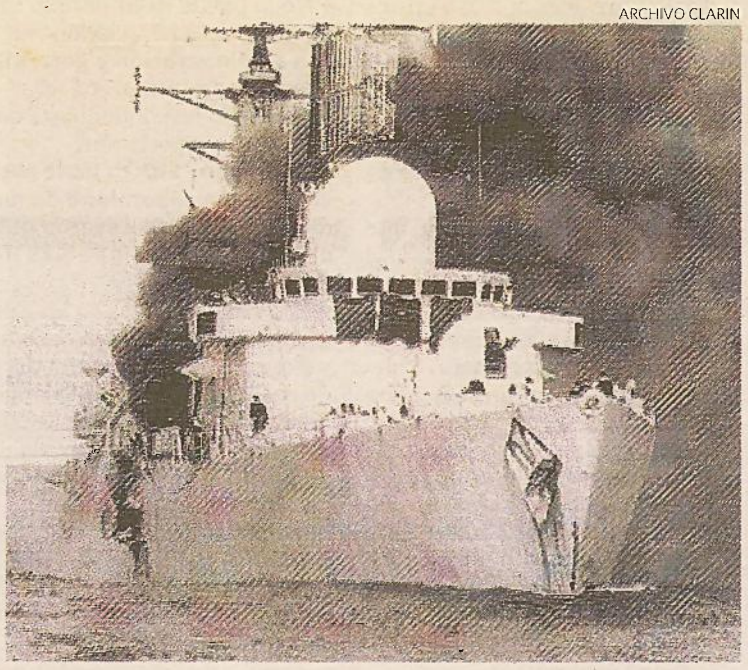
A 26 AÑOS DE LA GUERRA NO SE SABE CON CERTEZA CUANDO Y POR QUIEN FUE ATACADO EL BUQUE BRITANICO

Crece la polémica por el hundimiento del destructor "Sheffield" en Malvinas



El "Sheffield". Humeante, ayudado por la fragata "Arrow" y un helicóptero. El mar está calmo y casi sin olas, como se afirma, lo estaba el 1 de mayo. Abajo, el impacto sobre el que tampoco hay acuerdo: algunas fuentes señalan que corresponde a un Exocet. Otras fuentes dicen que el daño que provoca un Exocet es mucho mayor.

ARCHIVO CLARIN



• La Armada y la Fuerza Aérea se adjudican el ataque. Sólo los ingleses saben la verdad.

Memoria

Alberto Amato
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Una cosa es cierta: el destructor británico *Sheffield* **fue atacado por aviones argentinos**, ni bien iniciada la guerra en Malvinas, en mayo de 1982. Herido de muerte, se hundió días después.

La historia oficial dice que dos Súper Etendard de la Armada **atacaron al destructor el 4 de mayo.** Los pilotos Augusto Bedacarratz y Armando Mayora **dispararon dos misiles Exocet** a un blanco señalado por un avión explorador naval *Neptune*. **Dieron en el blanco.**

Otra historia, también oficial dice que **el 1 de mayo**, tres aviones M5 Dagger, piloteados por Norberto Di Meglio, Gustavo Aguirre Faget y César Román, miembros de la *Escuadrilla Torno* **bombardearon a tres buques británicos** que cañoneaban Puerto Argentino. **También dieron en el blanco.** La parte no oficial de esa historia asegura que **fue en ese ataque cuando se hirió de muerte** al *Sheffield*.

Los británicos, que conocen desde siglos el valor del silencio en una guerra, y en la posguerra, **callaron toda acción militar**, propia o argentina, entre el 1 y el 3 de mayo. **El 4 admitieron que el** *Sheffield* había sido hundido. Lo dijo el entonces canciller Francis Pym ante el Parlamento. **Pero el *Sheffield* no estaba hundido todavía.** De hecho permaneció a flote varios días más, se cree que hasta el 10 de junio. **¿Por qué Pym lo "hundió" antes de tiempo?**

Desentrañar la verdad, al menos aproximarse a ella, no tiene hoy más valor que el de **comprender mejor aquella guerra.** El 2 de mayo de ese año, **el submarino nuclear *Conqueror* hundió al crucero General Belgrano**, en el que murieron 323 hombres. **Ese ataque británico cobra otra dimensión** si el *Sheffield* fue atacado el 1 de mayo por la Fuerza Aérea.

La única versión sobre el "Sheffield" es británica. Y lo dieron por hundido cuando aún estaba a flote

También sería importante saber qué y por qué callaron los británicos en su momento. Quienes sostienen que el *Sheffield* fue atacado el 1 de mayo, arriesgan que **los dos pilotos de la Armada hicieron blanco en el portaaviones "Hermes"**, donde tenía su puesto de mando el jefe de la *task force*, almirante John Woodward.

Para intentar una aproximación a los hechos, **Clarín** acordó una entrevista casi informal con los pilotos Di Meglio, Aguirre Faget y Román. Debió hacerse el lunes 28 de abril en el Departamento Malvinas del Edificio Cóndor, pero **fue cancelada**, según versiones, por el titular de la fuerza. Este diario sí conversó por teléfono con los ex pilotos navales Bedacarratz y Mayora. Es innegable que a veintiséis años de la guerra, persiste aún cierta pugna entre los veteranos de las dos fuerzas. Para los marinos **no hay posibilidad de error**: ellos le dieron al *Sheffield* :

"El nuestro fue un ataque de libro –dijo Mayora *El avión explorador detectó la emisión radioeléctrica de un radar 965, que están instalados en los destructores clase 42 como el 'Sheffield'. teníamos bien en claro a qué barco le disparábamos porque era igual a nuestros destructores 'Santísima Trinidad' y 'Hércules'. Contar la historia de otra manera es ir contra la realidad. No tiene asidero.*

La otra campana también tiene **argumentos fuertes.** Los británicos admitieron en su momento que el 1 de mayo fueron atacados el destructor tipo *County*, *Glamorgan* y las fragatas *Arrow* y *Alacrity*. Pero no el *Sheffield*. Desde dos años después de terminado el conflicto, el comodoro Rubén Moro sostiene en su libro *"La guerra inaudita"*, que los tres pilotos de la Fuerza Aérea hicieron blanco sobre un destructor del *Tipo 42* (no del tipo *County*.como el *Glarmoran*) Y que ese destructor era el *Sheffield*.

Moro afirma también que luego del 4 de mayo hubo una **notoria disminución de la actividad aérea** británica en las islas, lo que daría crédito a un eventual daño hecho al *Hermes* por los dos pilotos de la Armada, que sin embargo **rechazan de plano esa inquietante presunción.**

El clima es un dato fundamental. Pero se ha convertido casi en un secreto de guerra. El 1 de mayo el mar estaba extrañamente calmo en las islas, según los británicos. Mientras que el 4, las aguas eran tempestuosas y con altas olas encrespadas. El parte meteorológico en Puerto Argentino el 4 de mayo, que rescata Moro en su libro, cita fuertes vientos, "neblina, techo de nubes, cielo cubierto".

Si el Sheffield fue atacado el 1° de mayo, el hundimiento del Belgrano, el 2 de mayo, cobra otra dimensión

Ni los británicos se ponen de acuerdo sobre el clima del 4 de mayo (ver: **"¿Qué tiempo hacía..."**) Pero es cierto que las fotos del *Sheffield* humeante en un mar apacible y casi sin oleaje, se acercan más al escenario del 1 de mayo que al del 4.

Una foto no sirve para revelar un secreto, sólo para alimentar una duda. Es la que yace bajo las frías aguas del Atlántico, entre la herrumbre oscurecida del *Sheffield* y que pone al portaaviones británico *Hermes* entre los grandes secretos de una guerra, que todavía esconde demasiados.

¿Qué tiempo hacía en Malvinas el 4 de mayo?

A. Gavson y D. Rice
Autores de "El hundimiento del Belgrano". Afirman que el 4 de mayo había "condiciones meteorológicas malas"; en cambio, el 1 "el mar está más calmo que nunca.". Adjudican el ataque al "Sheffield" a la Armada.

John "Sandy" Woodward
Jefe de flota británica. Sostiene que el 4 de mayo: "Los cielos eran brillantes y azules sobre el mar calmo" Adjudica la acción a la Armada. Sugiere que fue atacado el "Hermes", pero los Exocet dieron en el "Sheffield".

M. Hastings y S. Jenkins
Autores de "La batalla por las Malvinas". Dicen que el 4 de mayo "el tiempo estaba calmo y la visibilidad era extraordinaria" El británico Marshall Cavendish, dice todo lo contrario en "The Falklands war"

Emilio Villarino
Autor de "Exocet", dedicado a la Aviación Naval. Dice que el 4 de mayo había "un mar oscuro, con olas cuyas blancas crestas contrastaban con el color negro del agua. Allí abajo el tiempo estaba decididamente malo."

ENTREVISTA

Daniel Novegil
Presidente de Ternium, la controlante de SIDOR

La mano derecha de Paolo Rocca está al frente de las negociaciones con Hugo Chávez. Dice que aún en minoría, quieren seguir dentro de la empresa.

Ismael Bermúdez
ibermudez@clarin.com

LEO VACA

NEGOCIADOR. NOVEGIL, AYER, EN LOS CUARTELES CENTRALES QUE TIENE TECHINT, EN CATALINAS NORTE.

"Techint quiere seguir en SIDOR, aún como socio en minoría de Venezuela"

El viernes Daniel Novegil, presidente de Ternium, la principal empresa del grupo Techint, regresó de Caracas, donde estuvo negociando con el vicepresidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Ramón Carrizalez y los ministros de Energía, Rafael Ramírez y de Industrias Básicas, Rodolfo Sanz, el futuro del grupo que lidera Paolo Rocca en la siderúrgica SIDOR, recién nacionalizada por el gobierno de Hugo Chávez.

Ayer, Novegil recibió a **Clarín**. En todo momento se mostró muy cauto al responder. "No puedo contestar porque forma parte de la negociación", respondió Novegil en varios tramos de la entrevista.

Después de asistir hoy al clásico **Boca-River**, quien comanda las negociaciones por el grupo siderúrgico vuelve a tomar un avión de regreso a Caracas.

"Aún siendo socio minoritario, Techint quiere seguir en SIDOR", insistió con la mira puesta en los conglomerados internacionales del acero que quieren ingresar o reforzarse en América latina.

Techint lidera el Grupo Amazonia que tiene el 60% de la SIDOR.

"Estamos dispuestos a llegar a un acuerdo, siempre que los términos sean justos y trabajemos para que SIDOR siga siendo exitosa"

Otro 20% está en manos del Estado venezolano y el 20% restante es de los trabajadores, a través de un Programa de Propiedad Participada. Semanas atrás, el gobierno de Venezuela anunció la nacionalización de la empresa. Y trascendió que tenía la intención de pasar a tener el 70% de la compañía, relegando a Amazonia al 10%.

– ¿Por qué tras casi 10 años de dirigir SIDOR y ser socios del Gobierno, Venezuela toma esa decisión?

– Entendemos la decisión en el contexto político de Venezuela. Es una decisión de oportunidad y estratégica del gobierno. Y estamos dispuestos a llegar a un acuerdo, siempre que los términos sean justos y luego continuemos trabajando para que, bajo control del Estado, SIDOR siga siendo exitosa.

– ¿Por qué quieren seguir en SIDOR, aún como socio minoritario?

– Porque nuestro proyecto industrial es único y de excelencia para Latinoamérica. Es capaz de competir en todos los frentes con los grandes grupos siderúrgicos que están llegando a la región. Y la única fuerza que puede oponerse a ese ingreso es la masa crítica que agrega SIDOR en Ternium, el consorcio que agrupa a Siderar de Argentina y empresas de Brasil, México, Guatemala.

–¿Cuánto está dispuesto a pagar Venezuela por los 50 puntos de SIDOR?

– Queremos un precio justo que debería ser el valor de mercado al que hacen referencia los tratados de protección de inversiones entre Argentina y Venezuela y los Protocolos del Mercosur. Y debería valuarse como se hizo en transacciones recientes y en empresas comparables. La planta hoy no tiene comparación con la de 1998. SIDOR pasó de producir 2,9 millones a 4,3 millones de toneladas de acero líquido, un aumento del 50%. Invertimos US$ 950 millones.

–¿Eso cuánto es?

– No puedo contestar porque estamos en medio de la negociación.

– ¿Cuánto ofreció Venezuela?

– No lo puedo decir porque forma parte de la negociación.

¿La administración y gerenciamiento serían compartidos?

– No puedo responder hasta que concluya la negociación.

– Se dice que SIDOR tiene pasivos ocultos, laborales o de medio ambiente, o derivaron utilidades a otras compañías del grupo. ¿Es así?

– A lo largo de estos 10 años, la gestión en todos sus aspectos fue supervisada por el Estado a través de sus directores. Los balances fueron aprobados por los directores del Estado, con excepción del de 2007 ya que, producido el conflicto, no se presentaron a la Asamblea. En materia laboral, alcanzamos el objetivo de cero accidentes mortales durante los últimos 3 años. Y en materia ambiental invertimos más de 90 millones de dólares. Cada 4 meses recibimos auditorías de las autoridades de aplicación de las leyes ambientales, sin observaciones relevantes. Quienes hablan de explotación y maltrato deberían venir a conocer la realidad del ambiente de trabajo.

– ¿También se argumenta que desabastecieron el mercado interno, privilegiando la exportación por los mayores precios internacionales?

"El Gobierno argentino está apoyando a Techint, haciendo lo posible para que se llegue a una solución razonable"

– SIDOR privilegió el abastecimiento interno, sacrificando exportaciones. En 1998 se importaba el 30% del mercado venezolano de productos planos. En la actualidad no hay importaciones. Y de 1,2 millón de toneladas que proveía en 1998, en 2007 suministró 2,5 millones al mercado venezolano.

– ¿Qué posición tiene el Gobierno argentino?

– Sin dudas, el Gobierno argentino está apoyando a Techint, haciendo lo posible para que se llegue a una solución razonable en beneficio del proyecto SIDOR.

– ¿Qué harían una vez que reciban el dinero de Venezuela?

– El nuestro es un grupo industrial. En consecuencia, lo que negociemos de SIDOR va a ser invertido en el crecimiento de Ternium, en Argentina, en Venezuela y en el resto de Latinoamérica.

¿Cuánto vale la empresa?

La pregunta del millón es cuánto vale SIDOR. Ni el Gobierno venezolano ni Techint quieren oficializar una cifra, para no poner un piso o un techo a la negociación.

Pero ya hay bancos de inversión, como Goldman Sachs o el Citigroup, que dicen que el 100% de SIDOR vale entre u$s 5.000 y 6.000 millones. Consultoras privadas afirman que Siderar de Argentina, que produce 2,6 millones de toneladas, vale u$s 2.900 millones. Eso llevaría el valor de SIDOR a casi u$s 5.000 millones. El 50% que está en juego rondaría entre u$s 2.500 millones y 3.000 millones.

Venezuela tiene otra mirada: la valúa en menos de la mitad. Así trascendió que por el 50% de SIDOR ofrecería u$s 800 millones y hasta menos. Argumenta que SIDOR tendría pasivos no reconocidos, una vez que se firme el convenio de trabajo o por temas de medio ambiente, y registraría utilidades inferiores por manejos internos en los "precios de transferencia" entre las filiales de Ternium.

¿Se acabó para siempre el petróleo barato?

EL COLOR DEL DINE

Silvia Naishtat
snaishtat@clarin.com

En 2002, la International Energy Agency y el Department of Energy de EE.UU. proyectaban el precio del barril de petróleo entre US$ 22 y 27 en 2020. Imaginaban **varios años de petróleo barato**. Pero la realidad destruyó sus cálculos con el crudo rozando hoy los US$ 114 y los pronósticos pasaron del dulce optimismo al pesimismo dramático.

Kjell Aleklett, con partida de nacimiento en Estocolmo, preside Aspo International dedicada a estudiar los ciclos de producción petrolera. Aspo acaba de establecer una filial en la Argentina. Consultado telefónicamente por **Clarín**, Aleklett fue contundente: "La crisis **es peor** de lo que imaginamos. No existen posibilidades de incrementar la producción mundial por encima de los 85 millones de barriles por día". Aleklett dice que durante los últimos 50 años el planeta tuvo una **correlación positiva** entre la disponibilidad de petróleo y su crecimiento. Pero si la producción declina, es probable una recesión global.

Aleklett desarrolló el concepto de *Peak Oil* que es como se llama al problema del pico en la producción petrolera. Según su visión, una vez que se alcanza el punto máximo, se ingresa en una meseta y luego comienza a caer. El cenit petrolero no significa el agotamiento del petróleo, aunque sí **el fin del petróleo barato**.

De acuerdo a las investigaciones de Aspo International, lo que se ha descubierto hasta el momento es el petróleo que se encuentra en tierra, con mayor presión, más liviano, sin mucho azufre y por lo tanto **fácil de extraer y refinar**. El petróleo que queda es off shore, de menor calidad, en yacimientos más pequeños y requiere **más dinero para extraerlo**. En los últimos 30 años el mundo ha encontrado menos petróleo del que ha consumido. El descubrimiento de nuevos yacimientos alcanzó su punto máximo en 1964. Se calcula que cerca de 50 regiones, entre las que figura EE.UU., el Mar del Norte y hasta la Argentina, ya alcanzaron la cima y, por lo tanto, producirán cada vez menos petróleo. ¿Qué nos espera? Aleklett razona que pronto se gastará el equivalente a un barril de petróleo para extraer otro barril.

10

De: Oscar Luis Aranda [mailto:oscarluisaranda@gmail.com]
Enviado el: Lun 05/05/2008 09:53 a.m.
Para: Amato, Alberto
CC: Gillermo Oyarzábal (CN Dir de Est. Hist. Navale)
Asunto: Sheffield Vs Glamorgan

Sr. Amato, soy el comodoro (R) Oscar Luis Aranda Durañona, desde hace OCHO (8) años Director de Estudios Históricos de la FAA. Con preocupación leí su nota Crece la polémica por el hundimiento del destructor "Sheffield" en Malvinas en la que Ud. recoge versiones antojadizas sobre los ataques aéreos contra la Fuerza de Tareas Británicas. Es cierto que algunos de nuestros registros históricos no coinciden con los británicos, pero este no es el caso del hundimiento de la Sheffield logrado el 4 de mayo de 1982 por aviones SUE de la Armada. La historia oficial de la FAA publicada en 1999 y redactada después de más de 15 años de trabajo investigativo de tres comisiones, nunca hizo caso de esa fantasiosa hipótesis de que los británicos hubieran ocultado el hundimiento hasta después de mandar a pique al Belgrano. En nuestro poder obran declaraciones de testigos que presenciaron el ataque del 1° de mayo, numerosas fotografías de los efectos del misil Exocet contra la Sheffield, copias del informe oficial de la Royal Navy y la bibliografía publicada por nuestros aviadores navales. Con un mínimo de sentido común se descarta de plano la teoría que Ud sugiere. Lo que lamento es que camaradas poco informados le hayan hecho incurrir en la equivocación de sacar una nota tan importante que, a decir verdad, no nos hace ningún favor. De paso le aclaro que durante la guerra de Malvinas estuve a cargo del Centro de Información y Control en Puerto Argentino y estoy en condiciones de desmentir que el 4 de mayo hubiese existido una notoria disminución de la actividad aérea. Quedo a su disposición para suministrarle los datos que necesite sobre la historia que, oficialmente, sostiene la Fuerza Aérea.
Atte.

Comodoro (R) Oscar Luis Aranda Durañona
Director de Estudios Históricos de la FAA
Viamonte 153 EP
Tel 4514-4268/69

05-may

Estimado Sr Amato, gracias por su respuesta y, sobre todo, por haber interpretado, la intención de mi nota. Como historiador, vivo tratando de acercarme a la verdad de los acontecimientos y a la obtención de fuentes primarias para reconstruirlos. Además, en la producción de la información histórica que hacemos, me esfuerzo por aplicar los métodos científicos de investigación y nunca nos tiramos a la pileta sin estar seguro de que tenga agua. Como la guerra de Malvinas dio y sigue dando lugar a que todo el mundo opine, existen pseudos investigadores que, usando testimonios parcializados o secundarios, sacan una cantidad impresionante de inferencias y, casi a diario, descubren la cuadratura del círculo. Lamentablemente, no se dan cuenta de que utilizan métodos del razonamiento que no son válidos en la historia. Si bien las teorías que elaboran tienen sentido y son atractivas, y todos desearíamos que fuesen ciertas, la Institución no puede salir al aire ni exponerse a sostener una versión que cualquier Perogrullo pueda retrucar. Normalmente estoy en mi oficina entre las 8 y las 13. Va ser un placer recibirlo. Un saludo.
com Aranda Durañona

PS, demás está decir que toda la información que yo pueda transmitirle es sólo para su propio coleto.

RE: Sheffield Vs Glamorgan
Amato, Alberto para usuario
05-may Responder

Estimado Comodoro Aranda
Le agradezco muchísimo su mensaje. Y le tomo la palabra para tomarlo como fuente de información.
Créame, no hay camaradas suyos o de cualquier otro miembro de las fuerzas armadas, que me hayan inducido a error. Es más: ni me dejaron hablar con ellos, como dice la nota.
Mi intención, como usted imagina, no fue, ni puede serlo, hacerle un flaco favor a su fuerza. Esta historia del Sheffield ronda desde 1982, que es cuando la escuché por primera vez en Comodoro Rivadavia, donde yo cubría la guerra, (bueno, lo intentaba) para la revista "La Semana".
Ahora se dio la posibilidad de publicarla porque ya hay un par de libros que hablan de ella y está por salir otro, creo que en breve.
He leído la historia oficial de la guerra escrita por los británicos (Lawrence Freedman) y hay en ella algunos errores que me hacen sospechar de la visión británica de la guerra (disculpe la audacia) Como usted no ignora, todavía hoy surgen revelaciones sobre la segunda Guerra que nos dejan helados y que se han impuesto a las historias oficiales. Por ejemplo (me acabo de enterar) la "devolución" a Stalin que los británicos hicieron de unos quince mil cosacos que hallaron en Austria al terminar la guerra. Se imagina el destino de esos muchachos.
Espero que un artículo periodístico no sea tomado como la verdad revelada. No somos historiadores, sino que acercamos elementos para un debate. No era otra mi intención, se lo aseguro. Por eso está en la nota la versión de los dos pilotos de la Armada que se contrapone a la especulación inicial.
Pero acépteme la propuesta de tomarlo como fuente de información. O al menos, de compartir un café cuando usted lo disponga. Va a ser un placer conocerlo personalmente

Un abrazo

Alberto Amato

Alberto Amato
Prosecretario de Redacción
Sección El País
(54 11) 43 09 75 47

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ANNEX A TO
REPORT OF HMS ANTELOPE BOI
DATED 11 AUGUST 1982

OFFICE OF
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, FLEET
NORTHWOOD
MIDDLESEX
HA6 3HP
Northwood 26161 Ext. 7157
TELEX 23139

00520/4.X

11 June 82

See Distribution

LOSS OF HMS ANTELOPE - BOARD OF INQUIRY

1. You are to assemble in HMS DRAKE at 0900 on 28 June 1982 as a board of inquiry whereof ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Royal Navy, is to be the President and hold a full and careful investigation into the circumstances leading to and attending the dissblement and later sinking of HMS ANTELOPE under the command of ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~Royal Navy, between 22 and 25 May 1982, calling before you such witnesses as are necessary and reasonably available to enable you to form correct conclusions. S44 S38 S44 S38

2. Specifically you should ascertain and identify by questioning those involved and other available witnesses the matters listed in Annex A. Although the matters in Annex A are significant, they are not intended to be exhaustive and all other areas of inquiry deemed pertinent should be scrutinized.

3. The Commanding Officer HMS ANTELOPE's preliminary report is at Annex B.

4. Should any information come to light which the President considers should be communicated urgently to me or to any member of my staff, such information is to be sent by any appropriate manner in anticipation of completion of the inquiry.

5. A list of those on board HMS ANTELOPE on 23 May 1982 is at Annex C.

6. The inquiry is to be conducted in accordance with the directions contained in QRRN Chapter 23, Appendix 38, and FLAGO 1619.

7. The report of the board is to be accompanied by minutes of evidence, or statements taken, and is to contain an expression of opinion on the degrees of adequacy of personnel, material and procedures.

8. The report is to be signed by each member of the board and is to be forwarded in original and unstapled form. The President is to deliver his report personally and brief me on the principal findings.

9. Shorthand writers will be detailed from the offices of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Flag Officer Plymouth and Flag Officer Portsmouth.

XXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Admiral

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ANNEX A TO
CINCFLEET'S 00520/4.X
DATED 11 JUNE 82

SPECIMEN MATTERS FOR INVESTIGATION

Operational

1. The Task Group Commander's assessment of the threat before the attack.

2. The Task Group Commander's intentions and policies in force at the time of the attack.

3. The Task Group communications plan before the attack.

4. The disposition of the Task Group.

5. The degree of readiness of the Task Group, and the ship, before, during, and after the attack.

6. The ship's OPDEF state immediately before the attack.

7. The manning states of operations teams, weapons, propulsion and generation systems, and the locations of personnel.

8. The damage control state and condition immediately before, and at the time of, the attack.

9. The nature and sequence of events before, during and after the attack.

10. The use of countermeasures, including chaff, against the attack.

11. Whether, and how, the ship's weapon systems and sensors were used.

Design/Maintenance

12. The adequacy of the Type 21's weapon and sensor fit and its ability to react to the threat.

13. The adequacy of the damage control and fire fighting organisation, procedures, equipment and training.

14. Any problems arising from the design and layout of Type 21 destroyers and their machinery and equipment, with particular regard to any hazardous materials.

15. The degree of readiness of, and confidence in, all weapons, sensors and communication equipments, including the degree to which standard operator checks and performance servicing logs were used.

16. Any shortcomings in machinery operating procedures.

17. The influence, if any, of the material state of the ship on events.

2-28

Explosives Ordnance Disposal

18. Narrative of actions relative to the UXB from time of bomb impact until arrival of EOD Team on board.

19. Narrative of actions by EOD Team from their arrival on board, including the advice to the Command on the implications of the Render-Safe Procedure (RSP) to be attempted.

20. Considerations which influenced RSP selected by EOD Team, and alternative measures considered.

Environmental

21. The environmental conditions and observed effect on air picture compilation.

22. Any evidence of stress affecting the ship's company before the attack.

23. Any evidence of efficiency being reduced because of seasickness, shortage of sleep, or length of time closed up at action and defence stations, or any other cause.

Training

24. The adequacy or otherwise of individual training and preparation of personnel.

25. The adequacy or otherwise of whole-ship training and preparation of personnel.

Administrative/Medical

26. Whether those trained in First Aid were adequate in numbers and in expertise.

27. Whether First Aid parties were closed up.

28. Whether the emergency operating station was rigged.

29. Whether access to the Sick Bay and First Aid stations was affected by damage.

30. Whether any casualties were treated.

31. Whether any clinical diagnoses of causes of death were established.

32. Whether man-made fibres rather than cotton were worn by personnel, and whether these fibres contributed to burns.

33. Any evidence of toxic fumes arising from electrical cable insulation, plastics, cushions, etc.

Rescue and Salvage

34. Brief narrative of immediate rescue assistance by other ships to HMS ANTELOPE and her personnel.

35. Brief narrative of taking in tow, and eventual sinking.

36. Summary of equipment, materials, etc salvaged from the ship before she sank.

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Page 1 of 7
SER NO 269

HMS ANTELOPE Board of Inquiry
HMS DRAKE
Plymouth
Devon

Commander-in-Chief, Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex
HA6 3 HP

11 August 1982

Sir,

1. We have the honour to submit our report into the circumstances leading to and attending the disablement and later sinking of Her Majesty's Ship ANTELOPE under the Command of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy, on 23rd May 1982 in San Carlos Water, Falkland Islands. S44 S40 S38

Background

2. HMS ANTELOPE's last BOST was in 1980, a COST in 1981 was reduced to four days before deployment to the West Indies. This coincided with a change of Command and key officers. The programme offered limited opportunity for training and unsatisfactory results in AAW gave cause for concern, particularly since the WSA4 system was below SAT standard throughout 1981. XXXXXXXXXX proposed that the ship undertake a BOST in place of COST in 1982; this was rejected on operational grounds. During the first sea week of COST ANTELOPE was detached for Operation CORPORATE: representations by the Staffs of FOF2 and FOST that the ship should not be first choice were not entertained because of the gravity of the situation. S44, S40, S38

The Disablement and Sinking of HMS ANTELOPE

3. Events leading to the sinking of ANTELOPE occurred in four phases;

a. Operations in San Carlos Water.

b. Preparations for Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

c. Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

d. Damage Control and Firefighting after the explosion.

Operations in San Carlos Water

4. Warning Following duties at Ascension Island and passage ANTELOPE arrived in the TEZ 21 May. She received twelve hours notice for tasks which would take her into San Carlos Water and her first action. On 22 May XXXXXXXX XXXvisited the ship and advised that visual control of weapons was essential given the poor radar performance close to land and that the Command arrangements should be modified accordingly. He was struck by the considerable improvements he saw since last in ANTELOPE but also by their relative inexperience. Some changes to improve the visual gunnery control S44, S40, S38

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ANTELOPE

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Page 2 of 7

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arrangements were [redacted] S44, S38

The Attack in San Carlos Water

5. Following warning, four Skyhawks were sighted crossing the entrance to San Carlos Water. The aircraft divided into two pairs and re-emerged from separate directions over the land. ANTELOPE was singled out for a co-ordinated attack by aircraft approaching from the surrounding hills below the skyline. The first pair attacked from astern breaking from low hills at about 2 miles; they were engaged with Seacat and 4.5" gun in the rifle mode, one aircraft turned away and was pursued and possibly destroyed by Seacat. The remaining aircraft was unsuccessfully engaged by the 4.5" gun; it released a bomb which entered forward on 2 Deck but did not explode. Its impact caused the death of [redacted] S44 S40 S38

6. Simultaneously the remaining two aircraft flew down the hills across Fanning Harbour; one aircraft passed astern whilst the other attacked at low level from starboard. It was engaged and hit by the starboard 20 mm gun [redacted] causing it to strike the mainmast, disintegrate and crash into the sea. A bomb released by this aircraft entered amidships on 2 Deck. A third aircraft attacked but the engagement was inconclusive. S44, S40, S38

7. Although holed and damaged, ANTELOPE's operational capability for existing tasks was not significantly impaired and she continued patrol under threat of further air attacks. A request for assistance to deal with two unexploded bombs (UXB) was made at 1730.

Preparations for Explosive Ordnance Disposal

8. The possibility that a bomb might explode was acknowledged but the implications were not considered fully. [redacted] S44, S38 However the Ship's Company was sent to the Upper Deck; the effect of this was to destroy the integrity of the ship's damage control organisation. Damage control parties and facilities were not re-deployed and steps were not taken to mitigate any disruption to ship's services.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)

9. The [redacted] is responsible for co-ordinating the arrangements on board for the disposal of unexploded ordnance. Briefly he met the Army EOD Team [redacted] when they embarked at about 1900. Subsequently the [redacted] took little part in the EOD arrangements and [redacted] liaised between the EOD team and the Command. The team were not briefed about adjacent magazines and hazardous materials which might have influenced the selected method of disposal. S44 S40 S38; S44, S40, S38; S44, S40, S38; S44, S40, S38

10. The EOD team decided first to render safe the after bomb in the ACU Compartment (2G). Three attempts were made to remove the pistol from the bomb remotely by rocket wrench but these failed. It was decided then to use a de-armer. Within about a half-minute of this attempt the bomb exploded killing [redacted] instantly and injuring [redacted] A hole 35 feet wide was blown in the ship's side from the boot-topping to the upper deck and primary S44, S40, S38

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6 - 25

damage was inflicted in both engine rooms and to about five adjacent compartments.

Post Explosion - Firefighting and Damage Control

11. The bomb exploded at 2120. The ship was nominally in DC State 1 Condition Zulu but with most members of the Ship's Company in the hangar. It was dark. Immediate reactions were confused; the Ship's Company surged on to the Flight Deck to avoid blast and smoke, many were bowled over but injuries were slight. Officers and Senior ratings re-organised men into departmental and DC groups and on their own initiative some senior ratings took first aid firefighting action on the starboard boat deck above the bomb hole. Initial success to extinguish separate sources of fire in the engine rooms was short-lived because smoke forced withdrawal; back-up was not forth coming and firemain pressure subsequently failed. We judge that from about 3 - 5 minutes after the explosion the fire consolidated and spread rapidly. Access between decks was attempted from aft but co-ordinated effort was not made to approach from forward.

12. Restoration of the firemain was not attempted despite the availability of power supplies and emergency fire pumps were not used; an LCU provided very limited firefighting capacity off the starboard side. The fire spread across the ship threatening to separate forward from aft and caused serious risk of explosion in the main Seacat magazine.

13. It became evident to XXXXXXXXXXX that the ship might need to be abandoned; he instructed XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX to continue all attempts at firefighting commensurate with personnel safety and requested landing craft to stand-by. Shortly afterwards the fire divided the ship into two sections. XXXXXXXXXXX, who was forward, and the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, on the Flight Deck, simultaneously ordered the Ship's Company to Abandon Ship. This was accomplished swiftly and without incident. 20 minutes later there was a major explosion thought to be a magazine. The ship continued to burn throughout the night and several explosions occurred. At daybreak she was afloat but her back was broken and at noon following a further explosion she sank. S44, S40, S38 / S44, S40, S38 / S44, S40, S38

Summary

14. ANTELOPE was not fully 'worked up'. On reaching the TEZ warning of operations was short, she received no operational briefing and was unpractised for air defence in confined waters. She had spent little time in company with warships and had no experience of action. In San Carlos Water ANTELOPE's station was exposed to co-ordinated attack which divided her firepower. The visual weapon control arrangements could have been improved and ambiguous instructions prevented one engagement. Despite damage from two UXBs the ship remained operational for her present task. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX In consequence earlier failings in preparation combined with the shock of the bomb explosion caused a situation from which it was virtually impossible to recover and the loss of ANTELOPE became inevitable. S44 / S38

<u>The Effect of Action on the Ship's Company</u>

15. Officers and ratings probably suffered from battle stress, the effects of which tend to be more marked among men inexperienced in action. In ANTELOPE we consider this would have been evident in three stages:

a. <u>During Air Attack</u> There were some procedural errors due to inexperience but there is no evidence that these were due to battle stress.

b. <u>After Air Attack</u> There is some evidence of total concentration by [redacted] on the perceived main task of air defence and a lack of consideration given to the consequences of EOD failure. This concentration on one task and the exclusion of secondary tasks is typical of behaviour under battle stress. [redacted] S44, S38

c. <u>After the Bomb Explosion</u> The unexpected explosion placed the entire ship's company under intense stress. [redacted] S44 S38

16. The assessment of the degree to which the ship's company suffered from battle stress is subjective and cannot be quantified. We have therefore judged that its effects after air attack was likely to be 'moderate' and that suffered after the explosion was likely to be 'severe' but with considerable individual variation.

<u>Analysis</u>

17. <u>Operations Room and Weapons Manning</u> ANTELOPE had little time to think-through changes before entering San Carlos Water. Belief persisted that warning radar and the primary control of weapons systems would remain effective; [redacted] S44 S38

18. <u>Damage Control Preparations for Bomb Disposal</u> After attack the ship remained at NBCD State 1 but, the later move of the ship's company to the Upper Deck destroyed this posture. Consideration was not given to the disruption of ship's services should a bomb explode and material preparations were not taken. [redacted] S44 S38

[redacted] S44

[redacted] S40

[redacted] S38

[redacted] S44

[redacted] S40

[redacted] S38

Principal Conclusions

22. HMS ANTELOPE was sunk as a result of damage and an uncontrolled fire caused by the explosion of an UXB whilst being rendered safe.

23. HMS ANTELOPE was not a fully worked-up fleet escort and key personnel were inexperienced in some aspects of operating their ship.

24. HMS ANTELOPE received twelve hours warning of her task; she was not briefed for, nor practised in that role.

25. The ship's armament was inadequate for the task allocated in San Carlos Water; that one, and possibly two aircraft were destroyed was a commendable achievement.

26. Adequate precautions were not taken to minimise the effects of damage in the event of an explosion of the UXBs.

[redacted] S44

[redacted] S40

[redacted] S38

[redacted] S44 S40 S38

Principal Recommendations

31. That the priority accorded to the satisfactory completion of OST be reviewed.

32. That procedures for the maintenance of satisfactory operational training standards be reviewed.

33. That improvements be made to the emergency control arrangements of GSA4 against low-level aircraft.

34. That improvements be made to the range, firepower and destructive capability of secondary armament fitted in T21 frigates.

35. That Render Safe Procedures for United Kingdom ordnance be authorised and promulgated.

36. That procedures for the disposal of unexploded ordnance in HM Ships, together with guidance on the damage that might be caused by explosion, be authorised and promulgated.

37. That improvements be made to the fixed and portable firefighting arrangements in T21 frigates.

Further Conclusions and Recommendations

38. Our further conclusions and recommendations are summarised at Annex B.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servants

[redacted] N/R N/R

LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex A	Directive
Annex B	Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations
Annex C	Chronology of Events
Annex D	Background
Annex E	Ship Information
Annex F	xxxxxxxxxxxxx)
Annex G	Preparations for OPERATION CORPORATE
Annex H	Passage to the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) and Operations in the Amphibious Operations Area (AOA)
Annex J	Air Attack against HMS ANTELOPE in San Carlos Water
Annex K	Post Attack
Annex L	Damage Control Preparations for Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)
Annex M	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
Annex N	Post Explosion
Annex P	Rescue, Salvage and Sinking
Annex R	Damage Control
Annex S	Weapons Systems
Annex T	Communications
Annex U	Machinery and Ship Systems
Annex V	Training
Annex W	Aviation
Annex X	Medical
Annex Y	Casualties
Annex Z	Conduct of the Board and list of witnesses

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Annexes:

A. Specimen Matters for Investigation.
B. The Commanding Officer HMS ANTELOPE's Report dated 4 June 82.
C. List of Personnel on board HMS ANTELOPE on 23 May 82.

Distribution:
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, Royal Navy
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX MBE, Royal Navy
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy

N/R

Information:

The Medical Officer-in-Charge
RN Hospital Plymouth (Annex A only)

JB

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ANNEX B – SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Background (Annex D)

1. The circumstances under which ANTELOPE was required to fight in San Carlos Water differed considerably from those practised in peace.

2. The circumstances of ANTELOPE's action in the Falkland Islands may have a bearing on other UK defence commitments.

3. The state of operational training suffered as a result of shortened OST in 1981 and 1982.

4. The operational programme in 1981 had limited opportunity to remedy training shortfalls, particularly in AAW.

[redacted] S44, S40, S38 S23

Preparations for Operation CORPORATE (Annex G)

9. Storing for Operation CORPORATE was accomplished satisfactorily within the 48 hours allocated.

10. Experience gained in Exercise WISE VIRGIN 81 was a significant factor in the successful storing.

Passage to the Total Exclusion Zone and Operations in the Amphibious Operations Area (Annex H)

11. ANTELOPE became aware at a very late stage of her task in the AOA.

12. Importance of weapon emergency modes was not appreciated nor practised sufficiently.

13. ANTELOPE was able to take command of and work up 5 LSLs.

14. Warning of the number and size of airdropped loads was inadequate. Some loads could not be recovered.

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15. The escort of POW's required modifications to manning at defence watches.

16. NBCD preparations were generally in accordance with advice from CINCFLEET and SHEFFIELD survivors.

17. The very low fuel state in potential icing conditions caused concern about ship stability.

Air Attack against HMS ANTELOPE in San Carlos Water (Annex J)

[redacted] 544 540 538

21. The radar performance in San Carlos was severely degraded and enemy aircraft were not detected.

22. Primary methods of weapon control could not be used.

23. Olympus funnel gases obscured a visual target and made a good aiming point for attacking aircraft.

24. The ship was placed in the front line without having a period of acclimatisation in the war zone.

25. The ship was unaware of the co-ordination between ship and shore assets.

26. The effective range of secondary armament and mounted small arms was inadequate; and that their deterrent and destructive effect was limited.

27. Stoppages occurred on both 20mm guns and the GPMG because of jammed or toppled rounds.

Post Attack (Annex K)

28. Weapon systems remained effective in emergency modes after the action damage.

29. Action damage repairs were carried out promptly. The restoration of supplies to the fire pumps was particularly noteworthy.

30. The forward bomb took over 30 minutes to locate and identify. The after bomb was wedged to prevent it rolling across the compartment.

31. A total power failure occurred probably when the TRU's were changed over.

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32. Gas R22 released from the damaged refrigeration plant affected personnel in the vicinity.

33. There was little awareness of the potential damage that could have been caused by two UXBs.

Damage Control Preparations - EOD (Annex L)

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39. The decision to remove all but skeleton staff to the upper deck for safety prevented any loss of life or serious injury.

40. The stationing of the xxx in the SCC as a communication number between the EOD team and the Command precluded his use as Action NBCDO in the event of an explosion. S44, S40, S38

41. With exception of four ICABA sets from the after DC section base no portable firefighting or DC equipment was taken to the upper deck.

42. The isolation of the after sections of the Salt Water System left across the bulkhead at 57 station on 2 deck and the AAMR and AER should have been moved further aft.

43. The isolation of the forward section in the AER should have been moved forward to the FAMR.

44. Because of the selected isolating positions for the Salt Water Service the damage to the pipework in the area destroyed by the explosion would have breached seriously the integrity of all three sections.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) (Annex M)

[redacted] S44 S40 S38

52. [redacted] was killed when the after bomb exploded. S44, S40, S38

53. The removal of personnel to the Flight Deck during the defusing attempts prevented severe loss of life.

54. The after bomb exploded while an attempt to render it safe using a de-armer was made.

55. No render safe procedures for United Kingdom unexploded ordnance exist.

56. There was no conclusive evidence to explain why the bombs did not explode on impact or shortly thereafter.

Post Explosion (Annex N)

57. The Ship's Company were not prepared for an explosion.

58. An alternative NBCD control organisation was not put into effect to co-ordinate countermeasures against the damage and the fire.

59. The following officers and men who took the initiative in immediate firefighting activities are noteworthy: [redacted] S44, S40, S38

60. The actions of [redacted] who attempted to fight the fire from the JRDH were noteworthy. S44, S40, S38

61. The Salt Water Service was not isolated at points which would best ensure the integrity of the system in the event of an explosion in G Section.

62. The Salt Water Systems in the after section did not provide a pressurised supply for more than a few minutes after the explosion.

63. The Salt Water Systems in the forward and amidships section were not pressurised.

64. At least one generator was running and on load until the time the ship was abandoned.

65. No attempt was made to restore the pressure in the Salt Water Service.

66. Portable pumps were not used.

67. The Rover gas turbine was not stowed in a position readily accessible for use on the Flight Deck.

68. A co-ordinated attempt was not made to use firefighting assets in vessels alongside. A firefighting equipped tug was not present in the anchorage.

69. Ship fitted automatic or manually operated firefighting spraying arrangements with the exception of the starboard STWS tubes were not activated.

70. Manual operating positions of main machinery space CO2 drenching and foam inlet tubes were sited in, or adjacent to, the immediate damage area and could not be used.

71. In the absence of immediate countermeasures the development of the fire, fuelled by inflammable liquids readily available in the damaged machinery spaces, was rapid and spread out of control.

Rescue, Salvage and Sinking (Annex P)

72. The rescue of personnel was conducted swiftly and efficiently.

73. The presence of helicopters during firefighting operations caused communication difficulties on the Flight Deck.

74. Nothing was salvaged on the 23rd May beyond the content of the Captain's Safe.

75. HMS ANTELOPE sank in San Carlos Water at about midday on 24 May 1982.

Weapon System (Annex S)

76. Before arrival in AOA

a. GSA4 primary AA mode had been proved only rarely and the results were below average.

b. A GWS24 firing in primary mode (auto/auto) had not been achieved since the 1980 refit.

c. Maintainers and operators did not have confidence in the Radar 992R MTI modification.

d. A satisfactory Distant Object check was not achieved after the post DED trials.

e. Extra 4.5" HE ammunition was stowed on the main magazine deck on locally manufactured wooden chocks. Only practice ammunition was stowed in the Gunbay.

f. Suitable targets to assess the AA performance of weapon systems were not provided.

g. Problems in setting up TVA2 video levels were not resolved.

h. The GPMG could not be fitted in the Lynx satisfactorily.

j. A Seacat was fired satisfactorily in manual but an emergency mode firing had not been attempted.

k. Two 4.5 firings were carried out in emergency control.

l. Radar performance checks were not conducted on passage because of EMCON restrictions.

m. The movement of Sea Skua missiles from the magazine was difficult in a moderate sea state.

n. Inadequacies with WSA4 operational programme Issue 06 were only resolved after entering the TEZ.

77. Operations in the AOA

a. The ship entered the AOA with no significant weapon defects.

b. The ship's land-locked position in action prevented the use of radar and weapons in primary modes.

c. The 4.5" gun was fired in rifle mode. The gun safety switch opened on a number of occasions due to misalignment between gun and LAS.

d. In action there was a 4.5" gun stoppage due to a phantom round.

e. Loss of communications between the 4.5 Power Room and the Operations Room delayed gun stoppage diagnosis.

f. One Seacat was not launched because the low angle firing limitations were not fully understood.

g. One Seacat was not fired because safety orders were ambiguous.

h. 20 mm gun stoppages occurred due to toppled rounds.

j. Action damage repairs were carried out promptly.

k. Emergency modes for 4.5" gun and Seacat remained available after action damage.

l. WART was split into three to spread expertise in case of action damage.

m. 4.5" gun and Seacat in emergency modes and secondary armament were inadequate defence against low level aircraft attacks.

Communications (Annex T)

78. The Communications Equipment was satisfactory; manning was adequate for normal tasks.

79. Additional manpower was necessary to discharge adequately command responsibility for the LSL Group.

80. Some communications networks were overloaded.

81. Arrangements for the emergency destruction of classified material were unsatisfactory.

Machinery and Ship Systems (Annex U)

82. The material state throughout the deployment and Operation CORPORATE was assessed as good.

83. The selection of an Olympus engine whilst manoeuvring at low speeds in low power produced excessive smoke which reduced lookout visibility down wind.

84. The thickness of the smoke was increased in the local cold air temperature.

85. The implication of poor visibility down wind was not reported to the Command for comment or action.

86. The isolation of the Salt Water System was based upon consideration of power supply failures not implications of action damage.

87. The physical separation of the after two hull and fire pumps was across one bulkhead only.

Training (Annex V)

88. HMS ANTELOPE had not completed full OST and the Command had not been fully tested.

89. Individual training was generally adequate, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx 544,538

90. Internally run exercises train the ship but do not test the Command.

Aviation (Annex W)

91. Aviation War Orders were not issued until the ship had sailed.

92. Outstanding stores demands for CRITLIST items were met before the ship sailed.

93. ANTELOPE's Lynx (XZ723) survived and was transferred to HMS FEARLESS.

94. The Lynx "on-the-grid" during air attack was repeatedly vulnerable to damage.

Medical (Annex X)

95. Medical Officers and ratings appointed to ships frequently have no previous sea-going experience. It is important that the medical organisation of a ship for war and principles of battle casualty care are included in training programmes.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx S44, S38

97. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx was not involved with other Heads of Department during the action and subsequent events. S44, S40, S38

98. Stress due to sleep loss, irregular or missed meals, watch keeping, drinking, seasickness, drugs or ergonomic factors was not a significant problem.

99. Casualty treatment and evacuation were satisfactory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Background (Annex D)

1. That a review be made of the relevance of operations in the Falkland Islands to other UK defence tasks.

2. That the priority accorded to the satisfactory completion of OST in ships operational programmes be reviewed.

3. That the procedures for the maintenance of satisfactory operational training standards be reviewed.

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Preparations for Operation CORPORATE (Annex G)

7. That the WISE VIRGIN exercise analysis be distributed and that agreed procedures be incorporated in the Fleet Preparations for War.

Passage to the Total Exclusion Zone and Operations in the Amphibious Operations Area (Annex H)

8. That airdrop loads be prepared in sizes that can be handled satisfactorily by the ship and her helicopter at sea.

9. That safety aspects of low fuel states in icing conditions be promulgated.

Air Attack against HMS ANTELOPE in San Carlos Water (Annex J)

10. That emergency/visual weapon control arrangements be reviewed in the light of this report (See Annex S).

11. That a review be made of the effectiveness of the secondary armament in T21 frigates in the light of this report (See Annex S).

12. That emergency methods of firing weapons are practised more fully.

13. That the efficiency of smokeless burners be investigated.

14. That the efficiency of 992 Radar with MTI be investigated (See Annex S).

Post Attack (Annex K)

15. That the effects of R22 from damaged refrigeration plant be promulgated.

16. That the causes of total power failure when TRUs were changed over be investigated.

Damage Control Preparations for EOD (Annex L)

17. That Fleet training requirements take account of Damage and Firefighting Countermeasures appropriate for EOD.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (Annex M)

18. That when bomb disposal teams are called to assist ships dealing with unexploded ordnance, an extremely close liaison is maintained and ship hazards are discussed thoroughly with the team.

19. That procedures for the disposal of unexploded ordnance in HM Ships be authorised and promulgated. These should contain instructions as to which authorities should be consulted.

20. That guidance be promulgated on the damage likely to be caused in HM Ships when ordnance explodes on board.

21. That render safe procedures for United Kingdom ordnance be published.

22. That the use of a de-armer on tail pistols be investigated.

Post Explosion (Annex N)

23. That the overriding requirement to maintain an effective NBCD control organisation, particularly when primary positions become untenable, be emphasised during training.

24. That the provision of special firefighting-equipped vessels in amphibious anchorages be considered in future operations.

25. That alternative positions for the operation of main machinery space CO2 drenching systems be investigated.

26. That the provision of alternative positions for introducing foam into main machinery spaces be investigated.

Rescue, Salvage and Sinking (Annex P)

27. That instructions be promulgated concerning the preservation of important ships documents when a ship is liable to loss or sinking.

Damage Control (Annex R)

28. That training should include information on the likely effect of ordnance and magazine detonations.

29. That all personnel complete mandatory firefighting courses before joining ships.

30. That Firefighting Schools and Sea Training Staff continue to emphasise the importance of firefighting dress.

31. That alternative stowages for Rover gas turbine fire pumps be investigated.

32. That a second Rover gas turbine fire pump be provided in T21 frigates.

33. That sea stand-pipes should be provided on the upper deck in T21 frigates.

34. That positions on the upper deck for introducting foam and activating CO2 in the main machinery spaces be considered for T21 frigates.

35. That ships gyros are not co-located.

36. That easily combustible materials used in the construction of ships be reduced as far as possible.

Weapon Systems (Annex S)

37. a. That GSA4 and GWS24 primary modes are proved satisfactorily before a ship proceeds to OST or is deployed.

b. That the unsatisfactory performance of TVA2 be investigated.

c. That a formal SAT standard be introduced for the Radar 992R MTI modification.

d. That radar operators be given practical training in the use of MTI.

e. That instructions be issued about the stowage of war outfits of 4.5" ammunition.

f. That the provision of a pilotless target suitable for assessing GSA4 AA performance be examined.

g. That Fleet Training Standards be established for the operation of the 4.5" gun and Seacat in emergency modes.

h. That the emergency control arrangements for 4.5" gun against low level aircraft be improved.

j. That the drill for a Seacat PED control low angle firing be exercised regularly.

k. That improvements be made to the range, firepower and destructive capability of secondary armament in Type 21 frigates.

l. That the provision of independent communications be examined for emergency modes of weapon systems.

m. That the magazine handling arrangements for Sea Skua missiles in a Type 21 frigate be investigated.

<u>Communications</u> (Annex T)

38. That the adequacy of the communications complement when undertaking additional command functions be reviewed.

39. That the arrangements and facilities for emergency destruction of classified material should be reviewed.

<u>Machinery and Ship Systems</u> (Annex U)

40. That further investigation be conducted into reduction of smoke from Olympus engines at low power.

41. That analysis be undertaken on the most suitable isolation of the Salt Water System to meet all contingencies and advice be promulgated to T21 frigates.

42. That consideration be given to providing greater physical separation between Hull and Fire pumps supporting adjacent sections.

<u>Training</u> (Annex V)

43. That the priority accorded to OST be reviewed (see Annex D).

<u>Aviation</u> (Annex W)

44. That advice be included in Fleet Preparations for War (FCD 1) about the content of Aviation War Orders.

45. That advice be promulgated on the action to be taken with a helicopter on deck in the event of air attack.

<u>Medical</u> (Annex X)

[redacted] 544 538

48. That Squadron Medical Staff should visit their Squadron ships on a regular basis.

49. That the process of seasoning and the survivor syndrome be studied.

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FOR FLEET 38 SERIAL NO 324
3 PAGES Page 1 of 3

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

Telephone (Direct Dialling) 01-218 7165

(Switchboard) 01-218 9000

From: A R M JAFFRAY CB., Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Navy)

Ref: 14/2/35(21)

14 January 1983

Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex HA6 3HP

Sir

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS ARDENT

Reference: 520/241L dated 21 September 1982

1. I am commanded by the Admiralty Board of the Defence Council to inform you that they have taken note of your report and the Board of Inquiry proceedings forwarded under the reference.

2. The Admiralty Board made the following observations:

a. As in the loss of HMS COVENTRY the Inquiry highlights the vulnerability of ships against air attack when employed in-shore and armed with AAW not optimised for that situation. This incident has demonstrated the need for multiple channels of fire, capable of local control when under such attack.

b. Greater emphasis on training in the use of GSA 4 Emergency Modes willbe beneficial, but technical limitations suggest that it will be impossible to achieve reasonable results unless the LAS is replaced by a more suitable equipment. Consideration will be given to an Electro Optical sight incorporating a wide field of view for acquisition, a narrower field of view for tracking and a simple deflection device.

c. The observations on secondary armament are noted. It is not clear at present why 20 mm guns were not fitted before the ship left Ascension. There is no record of demand on DNADs for GPMGs before HMS ARDENT sailed; generally HM Ships did not begin to demand them until May when the LLAD policy was clarified. It is assumed that thereafter they were allocated to ships in accordance with an assessment of priorities.

284

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d. The need for improved education and more readily assimilated information on stability has been identified by other Boards of Inquiry and the DSAC Working Party. Improvements will be sought through the NBCD Committee structure; the Training Panel of that Committee will look at the training of xxxxxx in their task of informing the command of ship conditions (and the priority this has over weapon repair) as well as the ethics of rescue. S38 S40 S44

e. Provision of an Alternative Damage Control HQ is a lesson also derived from experience in HMS SHEFFIELD and HMS COVENTRY; this, and the possibility of improved control from the bridge, is under investigation for new designs and existing ships.

f. Factors leading to rapid spread of smoke and vulnerabilit of internal communications to damage have also been identified in other incidents; action is being taken to rectify these shortcomings in the Type 23 design, and as much improvement as possible will be made for ships under construction and in the Running Fleet.

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It is noted that despite the severity of the attacks and the mental disorientation they produced, most of the ship's company evidently behaved well, kept calm and in some cases showed heroism. Mental unpreparedness was, however, clearly an important factor in the loss of the ship. There were many officers and senior ratings who, although well trained professionally, were badly affected by the experience. Training policy will be reviewed on receipt of your advice on Flag Officer Sea Training's report on the preparation of ships' companies for the stresses of action.

h. The training aspects of the medical organisation will be examined by MDG(N) when all the CORPORATE medical reports have been analysed.

3. Your report and the proceedings have been taken into account in the "Lessons Learnt" studies in the Navy Department. The detailed lessons in both your report and the proceedings are also being followe up by the Staffs responsible. The Admiralty Board may wish to make further observations when all the lessons from Operate CORPORATE and from the Reports and Boards of Inquiry into other ship losses have been fully examined.

I am, Sir
Your obedient Servant

Copy to: The Flag Officer First Flotilla

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The .chool
HMS DRAKE
Plymouth
Devon

The Commander in Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex
HA6 3HP

6 August 1982

Sir

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMS ARDENT

1. We have the honour to forward our report and findings on the loss of Her Majesty's Ship ARDENT as directed in your letter No 00520/3.X dated 11 June 1982.

2. The Board convened at Devonport between 28 June and 6 August 1982. One hundred and twenty seven members of the Ship's Company were interviewed together with three persons from other authorities. Seventy six survivors were given medical interviews.

3. It became clear to the Board that, with some five weeks between the events and the Board first sitting, memories had faded, some stories had changed and a degree of mythology had developed. Much of this had resulted from the Ship's Company's time together homeward bound in SS CANBERRA and RMS QUEEN ELIZABETH II where much was mixed and exaggerated. Nevertheless we are satisfied that we have established the great majority of the relevant facts, and that those we lack would not seriously affect our findings.

4. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

PREPARATORY EVENTS

5. HMS ARDENT sailed for the Falkland Islands and Operation CORPORATE from Devonport on 19 April 1982. Despite having only four days warning of deployment she was well stored and in good material and operational state. Her recent programme had been ideal preparation for an operational task and had included COST, a JMC and Exercise ALLOY EXPRESS with the Amphibious Group. She had had a few recent personnel changes and many of the Ship's Company had been onboard for two years.

6. It is clear that the ship was highly respected by both Squadron and Flotilla staff, and was well organised and well led. She had an enviable record in Fleet Gunnery and Missile Competitions, and her Flight had a recent FOF3 commendation for efficiency. The Ship's Company were confident of their ability and had their tails up.

ARDENT

7. The passage South to Ascension Island was in company with HMS ARGONAUT and RFAs REGENT and PLUMLEAF. Six days were spent in the vicinity of Ascension and ARDENT then headed South with CANBERRA and ELK to join the FEARLESS group on 10 May.

8. Throughout the passage period training and briefing were conducted sensibly and conscientiously. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxhad made a commendably accurate assessment of the prime threat and xxxx ship's future employment, and took particular pains to train xxx weapon crews in the Emergency modes of control, knowing this was likely to be required on the day. However, no fixed wing assets were made available at any time for realistic AAW drills. S38 S40 S44

9. The ship had attempted to acquire several General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMGs) before sailing from Devonport. In the event they acquired only one, fitting this on the GDP along with four LMGs in various parts of the ship.

OPERATIONS IN FALKLAND SOUND

10. On the 19/20 May the Amphibious Group approached the Falkland Islands from the East, preparatory to a landing in the San Carlos area of East Falkland on 21 May. HMS ARDENT's initial role was to carry out Naval Gunfire Support from Grantham Sound to the South of the landing area and she was to be the first ship of the group to enter Falkland Sound. At 2010Z on 20 May ARDENT detached from the Amphibious Group and made a high speed transit to Falkland Sound passing through the North entrance into the Sound at midnight. She then proceeded straight to her Fire Support Station in the South of Grantham Sound. Although prepared for all eventualities her arrival was uneventful.

11. Surprisingly there was no 'call for fire' before dawn at about 1100Z, but from then on ARDENT was involved in regular Naval Gunfire Support on Goose Green Airfield and other targets. This was extremely successful and at least three Pucara aircraft were damaged on the ground. These engagements continued until about 1600 and by 1700 it was confirmed there was no further NGS requirement in that area.

12. After dawn had brought in a fine, clear day with excellent visibility, the first air attacks on the Group by Argentine aircraft commenced. Most of them were concentrated on the ships near San Carlos, but ARDENT was approached on three occasions by pairs of Pucara aircraft and by the occasional Mirage on its way up the Sound towards the AOA. All turned away when engaged by ARDENT. At about 1600Z a lone Skyhawk emerged from over the land close to the South of the ship and dropped two bombs in the water, one on either side of ARDENT. These failed to explode. On this occasion only the port 20 mm opened up, the warning being so short, but in general at other times the ship had time to react to the threat. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx Three Seacats were fired, and rapid changes between Naval Gunfire Support and AA defence were quickly and simply made using the flexibility of the GSA 4 system. S26 S40 S44

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MAJOR AIR ATTACKS ON HMS ARDENT

13. Having had confirmation of the completion of her Gunfire Support task at about 1700Z, ARDENT was told to 'split air attacks from the South' with HMS YARMOUTH. The origin of this order is obscure but ARDENT proceeded to a patrol line West of North West Island with YARMOUTH to the West of her.

14. Shortly after arrival in the new area at 1740Z a group of three A4 Skyhawks was sighted by ARDENT crossing Falkland Sound from the West. They circled the ship anti-clockwise at about two miles and then turned in to attack from the North East. This attack was pressed home vigorously from the port quarter, out of 4.5 gun arcs, and although 20 mm and LMGs blazed away, the Seacat, again in Emergency mode, failed to fire for no immediately obvious reasons.

15. The aircraft attacked with cannon and bombs, two of the bombs exploding in the Hangar area, one penetrating down through the After Switchboard and into the After Auxiliary Machinery Room without exploding, the others missing.

16. This attack caused major damage to the Hangar area, tossed the Seacat mounting onto the Flight Deck and severely damaged the Lynx helicopter. The After Switchboard was severely damaged with resultant loss of power including normal supplies to the 4.5 Mk 8 gun. There was flooding in the Dining Hall, Ship Control Centre and flat, and Galley areas due to fractured pipes, and a fire started in the starboard side of the Hangar. There were also several casualties.

17. The ship however still had steering and full control of main engines, and having reported her state to XXXXXXXXXX was ordered to proceed to San Carlos water. 538 540 544

18. Shortly after this as the ship headed North at about 1800Z a further attack of five A4 Skyhawks developed. They approached from either quarter and dropped a considerable number of normal and retard bombs of differing size. The ship was virtually defenceless and could not fend off this attack. Two to four bombs exploded in the ship aft of the Hangar and further unexploded bombs almost certainly penetrated into the ship from the Hangar area aft on the port side. Several bombs exploded in the water nearby and the ship whipped heavily. Again most of the bombs fell aft, but there was some damage to the plating on the starboard side of the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room resulting in a minor leak.

19. The bombs aft had devastated the Dining Hall and Pain Shop area where there were many casualties and the steering failed, although the Tyne engines were still driving the ship and were under control.

POST DAMAGE ACTION

20. Although a full damage assessment had not been completed the ship's team had virtually got the fire and flooding of the first attack under control when the second attack arrived.

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21. Following this attack [redacted] quickly surveyed the area from [redacted] he ordered 'Get out' of [redacted] The whole after part of the Ship's Company then started to move to the Boat Deck. S38 S40 S44

22. Communication between Bridge and Ship Control Centre was virtually non-existent at this time, and with the ship heading fast ashore [redacted] finally got orders through by zeroing the pitch lever setting. The last man out through the Ship Control Centre heard the order as he left. He re-entered and tripped the engines. The ship stopped less than a mile offshore and [redacted] then ordered an anchor to be let go. S38 S40 S44

23. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

24. Shortly after further limited discussion and with the ship now listing noticeably to starboard, [redacted] made the decision to abandon ship, and called HMS YARMOUTH alongside to take off [redacted] Ship's Company. S38 S40 S44

THE SINKING OF HMS ARDENT

25. At about 1855Z [redacted] was the last to leave HMS ARDENT, and HMS YARMOUTH, after a short delay when she fouled herself on ARDENT's anchor cable, then sailed at speed to San Carlos Water. There the survivors were transferred to the SS CANBERRA. HMS BROADSWORD had also picked up one survivor and she accompanied the other ships to the AOA. S38 S40 S44

26. On the way a check was carried out of the Ship's Company, and once on CANBERRA it was confirmed that 22 were dead or missing.

27. Shortly after dark CANBERRA sailed from the AOA and the ARDENT Ship's Company were on their way home. ARDENT was still afloat and was seen by BROADSWORD steadily burning throughout the night with several major explosions onboard. After 0600Z on 22 May, when BROADSWORD left the scene, no other person can be found to have seen ARDENT afloat. It is believed that the ship sank at about 0630Z.

28. Divers have subsequently visited the wreck which is about 4 cables South West of North West Islands.

ANALYSIS

29. HMS ARDENT was well prepared for the Falklands Operation. She was a well organised and efficient ship who had the right programme beforehand, had assessed the threat well and prepared as best she could to meet it. Her material state was high and personnel confident of their equipment and training.

30. In Falkland Sound, faced with short term warning of attack and Emergency mode of control of weapons, she repulsed various rather half-hearted air attacks, and at the same time carried out some excellent Naval Gunfire Support. However at the end of the day, in a somewhat exposed part of Falkland Sound, she succumbed to two determined multi-aircraft attacks which she had little chance of deflecting, and was seriously damaged. This damage would have been greater still had not many bombs failed to explode. The reason why Seacat failed to fire during the first of these attacks had not been fully substantiated.

31. The ship was abandoned following this serious damage because it was thought to be about to plunge. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

32. [redacted] S[illegible]

33. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

34. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

35. [redacted]

36. [redacted] S38 S40 S44 It is highly likely that the only fires at that time were in the Senior Rates Dining Hall port side with the associated spaces beneath, and around the Avcat pump in the Hangar. Neither was yet near the magazines and each could have been tackled provided firemain pressure remained available. There is a possibility that there were also minor fires in the Galley/Canteen vicinity.

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37. [redacted]

38. [redacted]

39. [redacted]

40. In abandoning ship there were no major problems and it was relatively speedy, there being a sense of urgency in both ships. [redacted]

41. [redacted]

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42. [redacted]

CONCLUSIONS

43. The Board has reached the following principal conclusions:

a. HMS ARDENT was well prepared, well stored and in good material state on arrival in the Falklands.

b. Her Ship's Company had achieved high standards in training and were confident in themselves and the ship.

c. [redacted] had accurately assessed the prime threat to his ship and her likely role, and trained accordingly. S38 S40 S44

d. HMS ARDENT's station in Falkland Sound was isolated and exposed her to air attack. This was acknowledged and [redacted] and [redacted] S38 S40 S44

e. The limitations on radar within Falkland Sound and the subsequent use of Emergency modes of Weapon control were expected by both [redacted] and the ship. S38 S40 S44

f. HMS ARDENT's weapon systems for defence against determined air attack close inshore were inadequate.

g. HMS ARDENT was hit by bombs as a result of two air attacks pressed home with determination.

h. Failure of the Seacat system to fire during the first major air attack on HMS ARDENT made her virtually defenceless.

i. There was a total breakdown of Damage Control Command and Control [redacted] S38 S40 S44

j. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

k. The greatest danger to the ship lay in the fires aft [redacted] S38 S40 S44

l. The decision by [redacted] to abandon ship, was justified on the evidence presented to him. S38 S40 S44

m. [redacted] made [redacted] S38 S40 S44

n. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

o. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

p. HMS ARDENT sank at about 220630Z May as a result of fire extending through the ship from aft causing magazines to explode which in turn initiated slow flooding through splintering of the ship's bottom. If the fire aft had been contained it should have been possible to save ARDENT. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

q. [redacted]

r. [redacted]

s. [redacted]

t. [redacted] S38 S40 S44

u. [redacted]

v. [redacted]

w. [redacted]

RECOMMENDATIONS

44. The Board make the following principal recommendations.

a. The GSA 4 emergency mode be significantly improved to allow a realistic chance of successful AA engagement.

b. The Type 21 frigate be fitted with additional short range weapon systems.

c. Further studies be undertaken to provide a basis for improving methods of preparing men for the stresses of action.

d. That an alternative Damage Control HQ(HQ2) be established and manned at Action Stations.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servants

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

unclass/NPM

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ANNEX A TO
REPORT OF HMS ARDENT BOI
DATED 6 AUGUST 1982

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OFFICE OF
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, FLEET
NORTHWOOD
MIDDLESEX
HA6 3HP
Northwood 26161 Ext. 7157
TELEX 23139

00520/3.X

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11 June 82

LOSS OF HMS ARDENT - BOARD OF INQUIRY

1. You are to assemble in HMS DRAKE at 0900 on 28 June 1982 as a board of inquiry whereof XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX is to be the President and hold a full and careful investigation into the circumstances leading to and attending the disablement and later sinking of HMS ARDENT under the command of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX between 20 and 23 May 1982, calling before you such witnesses as are necessary and reasonably available to enable you to form correct conclusions. S38 S40 S44

2. Specifically you should ascertain and identify by questioning those involved and other available witnesses the matters listed in Annex A. Although the matters in Annex A are significant, they are not intended to be exhaustive and all other areas of inquiry deemed pertinent should be scrutinized.

3. The Commanding Officer HMS ARDENT's preliminary report is at Annex B.

4. Should any information come to light which the President considers should be communicated urgently to me or to any member of my staff, such information is to be sent by any appropriate manner in anticipation of completion of the inquiry.

5. A list of those on board HMS ARDENT on 21 May 1982 is at Annex C.

6. The inquiry is to be conducted in accordance with the directions contained in QRRN Chapter 23, Appendix 38, and FLAGO 1619.

7. The report of the board is to be accompanied by minutes of evidence, or statements taken, and is to contain an expression of opinion on the degrees of adequacy of personnel, material and procedures.

8. The report is to be signed by each member of the board and is to be forwarded in original and unstapled form. The President is to deliver his report personally and brief me on the principal findings.

9. Shorthand writers will be detailed from the offices of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Flag Officer Plymouth and Flag Officer Portsmouth.

J D E FIELDHOUSE
Admiral

unclass/NPM

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ANNEX A TO
REPORT OF HMS ARDENT BOI
DATED 6 AUGUST 1982

Annexes:

A. Specimen Matters for Investigation.
B. The Commanding Officer HMS ARDENT's Report dated 3 June 82.
C. List of Personnel on board HMS ARDENT on 21 May 82.

Distribution:

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ANNEX A TO
CINCFLEET'S 00520/3.X
DATED 11 JUNE 82

ANNEX A TO
REPORT OF HMS ARDENT BOI
DATED 6 AUGUST 1982

SPECIMEN MATTERS FOR INVESTIGATION

Operational

1. The Task Group Commander's assessment of the threat before the attack.

2. The Task Group Commander's intentions and policies in force at the time of the attack.

3. The Task Group communications plan before the attack.

4. The disposition of the Task Group.

5. The degree of readiness of the Task Group, and the ship, before, during, and after the attack.

6. The ship's OPDEF state immediately before the attack.

7. The manning states of operations teams, weapons, propulsion and generation systems, and the locations of personnel.

8. The damage control state and condition immediately before, and at the time of, the attack.

9. The nature and sequence of events before, during and after the attack.

10. The use of the ship's weapon systems and sensors.

11. The use of countermeasures, including chaff, against the attack.

Design/Maintenance

12. The adequacy of the Type 21's weapon and sensor fit and its ability to react to the threat.

13. The adequacy of the damage control and fire fighting organisation, procedures, equipment and training.

14. Any problems arising from the design and layout of Type 21 destroyers and their machinery and equipment, with particular regard to any hazardous materials.

15. The degree of readiness of, and confidence in, all weapons, sensors and communication equipments, including the degree to which standard operator checks and performance servicing logs were used.

16. Any shortcomings in machinery operating procedures.

17. The influence, if any, of the material state of the ship on events.

Environmental

18. The environmental conditions and observed effect on picture compilation.

19. Any evidence of stress affecting the ship's company before the attack.

20. Any evidence of efficiency being reduced because of seasickness, shortage of sleep, or length of time closed up at action and defence stations, or any other cause.

Training

21. The adequacy or otherwise of individual training and preparation of personnel.

22. The adequacy or otherwise of whole-ship training and preparation of personnel.

Administrative/Medical

23. Whether those trained in First Aid were adequate in numbers and in expertise.

24. Whether First Aid parties were closed up.

25. Whether emergency operating station was rigged.

26. Whether access to the Sick Bay and First Aid stations was affected by damage.

27. Whether any casualties were treated.

28. Whether any clinical diagnoses of causes of death were established.

29. Whether man-made fibres rather than cotton were worn by personnel, and whether these fibres contributed to burns.

30. Any evidence of toxic fumes arising from electrical cable insulation, plastics, cushions, etc.

31. Any evidence to assist towards the registration of deaths, and towards giving further information to next-of-kin, such as - where each fatal casualty was last seen, his apparent physical condition at that time, and known or conjectured cause and circumstances of death.

Rescue and Salvage

32. Brief narrative of immediate rescue assistance by other ships to HMS ARDENT and her personnel.

33. Brief narrative of any attempt to take in tow; and eventual sinking.

34. Summary of any equipment, materials, etc salvaged from the ship before she sank.

Despliegue y actividades de la Artillería Antiaérea

DESPLIEGUE Y ACTIVIDADES DE LA ARTILLERÍA ANTIAÉREA

El comandante del Componente Aéreo del Comando Conjunto en las islas, brigadier Luis Guillermo Castellano, contaba, dentro de su organización, con un sistema de Control Aerotáctico (SCAT). Su núcleo nervioso era el Centro de Información y Control (CIC), a cargo del vicecomodoro Oscar Aranda Durañona, auxiliado por los mayores Alberto Kajihara y Héctor Pergolini; los tres eran expertos pilotos de combate en aviones Skyhawk y Mirage. La eficacia del funcionamiento del CIC se vio facilitada luego de su instalación en el mismo edificio de los tres comandos de las fuerzas. Ello permitió la conformación de un comando conjunto, y la integración de los órganos del CIC con oficiales del Ejército y Armada. Se logró un aceptable intercambio de datos con las unidades operativas y una evaluación rápida y segura de la información. Una de las funciones principales del CIC era la de coordinar la defensa aérea que, en esencia, debía detectar, identificar, interceptar y destruir todo incursor enemigo. Para ejecutar la tarea de destruir incursores enemigos, los únicos medios permanentes en Malvinas estarían constituidos por las unidades de Artillería de Defensa Antiaérea (ADA) de las tres fuerzas.

El 4 de abril el jefe de la BAM Mar del Plata, comodoro Luis Fabián Tolaba recibió la orden de operaciones del Comando Aéreo de Defensa, que establecía el siguiente movimiento de baterías:

- Una batería Superfledermaus con cañones Oerlikon 35 milímetros, al aeropuerto Puerto Argentino.
- Una batería Superfledermaus con cañones Oerlikon 35 milímetros y dos cañones Oerlikon de 35 milímetros a la Base Aérea Militar Río Gallegos.
- Una batería TCM de 20 milímetros, a la IX Brigada Aérea Comodoro Rivadavia.

Antes de recibir la orden de despliegue, las baterías y su personal estaban en condiciones de iniciar el movimiento con repuestos, municiones y equipos personales.

El personal técnico trabajó intensamente durante toda la jornada; aproximadamente a las 19:00 se terminó con los ajustes y calibraciones de la central de tiro Superfledermaus de la 2ª batería.

En el plan de embarque, se fijó el día 5 como fecha de despliegue. Para ello, se debió tener en cuenta el armamento, centrales de tiro, generadores, munición, vehículos, carpas, enmascaramiento, motogeneradores, compresores, equipos de mantenimiento, abrigo extra y elementos de primeros auxilios.

En dos C-130H comenzaba el despliegue, uno con destino a Malvinas y el otro a Río Gallegos (Santa Cruz).

Al arribo, en Malvinas se analizó la corrida probable de ataque, la proveniente del sector este, coincidente con el sentido de la orientación de la pista y se fijó que ese sector debía ser defendido por la batería con mayor potencia de fuego.

Esa misma noche se enfrentó el primer hostigamiento ambiental; descendió la temperatura abruptamente al caer el sol; el viento era fuerte y la sensación térmica muy baja.

El 6 de abril aterrizó un C-130H en el cual se trasladaba la central de fuego, generadores, piezas de artillería y munición.

Se procedió de inmediato a ubicar las piezas. Las posiciones elegidas fueron, en algunos casos, soluciones de compromiso, pero no había otra posibilidad por falta de tiempo y de maquinaria para desarrollar una infraestructura ideal.

La pista era primordial para el abastecimiento de la guarnición, puerta de entrada al movimiento logístico.

Desde que se declaró la zona de exclusión, cada aterrizaje de una aeronave implicaba darle una cobertura antiaérea hasta el momento del decolaje. Posteriormente, los aviones se pegaban a la superficie del mar para evitar ser detectados.

El 12 de abril se continuó con el ajuste de los cañones, y arribaron los últimos componentes.

Una vez instaladas las baterías en el aeródromo de Puerto Argentino, se designó al capitán Rodolfo Savoia para la conducción centralizada de la operación de defensa antiaérea. Para realizar dicha tarea se instaló un puesto de comando en el mismo aeródromo. Desde allí se operaba el radar ELTA de vigilancia local. Bajo su mando se integraron la 1ª batería Rheinmetal de 20 mm de la Base Aérea Militar Río Gallegos, a cargo del primer teniente Alberto Dalves y la 3ª batería Superfledermaus con cañones Oerlikon de 35 milímetros, cargo del primer teniente Spath.

Entre los días 15 y 17 de abril, el teniente coronel Arias, jefe del Grupo de Artillería de Defensa Antiaérea del Ejército (GADA 601) ubicó importantes armas de su unidad en el área del aeródromo para completar un escudo que resguardaría con éxito la pista, única puerta de enlace con el continente.

El 17 de abril arribaron seis secciones de proyectiles Tigercat y nueve Skyguard de Ejército. Dos secciones Tigercat y una Skyguard tomaron posición en la zona del aeródromo para completar la protección del sector.

Se analizó y evaluó la técnica de ataque británico para tenerlo en cuenta en los planes de fuego –un avión guía con un misil antirradar es seguido por los aviones caza bombardero-; se debía programar *no enganchar* al avión guía

hasta que no estuviera a distancia de fuego. La misma operación se mantendría ante un ataque de helicópteros.

Entre los días 25 y 28 de abril se registraron sucesivas alarmas rojas (ataque aéreo). Las incursiones no fueron confirmadas.

La tarea de detección se basó principalmente en el escuadrón de Vigilancia y Control Aéreo (VYCA), conducido por el mayor Miguel Silva, quien desplegó un radar Westinghouse AN/TPS 43 F, de 300 kilómetros de alcance. Este radar móvil fue complementado por un radar Alert MK 2 del Ejército. Juntos conformaron un sistema de alerta temprana, coordinado en el CIC de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina

En esa central operativa del mencionado centro se recibía y procesaba la información sobre:

- La ubicación de aeronaves en el aire y buques en superficie,
- los datos procedentes de otros radares de menor alcance de las unidades de artillería antiaérea,
- la visualización realizada por la Red de Observadores del Aire (ROA),
- las comunicaciones de los mandos de las tres fuerzas acerca de los movimientos de sus respectivos medios.

Esto permitía realizar una aceptable ubicación e identificación de los móviles aéreos y navales en el área, aunque severamente limitada, hacia el oeste de Puerto Argentino.

Con el cuadro de la situación aérea general, la central estaba en condiciones de alertar a las unidades de defensa antiaérea, y al resto de las unidades, sobre la aproximación de aeronaves incursotas para que cada mando pudiera adoptar las medidas activas y pasivas correspondientes. Asimismo, podía dirigir los aviones interceptores hacia las aeronaves enemigas y advertir a las tripulaciones propias en vuelo sobre la presencia de patrullas aéreas de combate (PAC) de las Task Force y guiarlos para evitar sus derribos. En la Defensa Aérea (DA) se logró una aceptable integración operativa. Por primera vez se conformó un centro Coordinador de Fuego Conjunto de Artillería Antiaérea (CCAAa), enlazado con el Centro de Información y Control. Ello permitió la conducción y control funcional de todas las unidades de la artillería antiaérea.

Existía una motivación importante para lograr la máxima coordinación. La concentración de unidades, los puestos de comando y la pista de la Base Aérea Militar Malvinas eran puntos vitales para la supervivencia de la guarnición militar. Con seguridad, la fuerza de tareas británica intentaría destruir esos blancos como primer objetivo.

En la Base Aérea Militar Cóndor, en Darwin, la defensa de la Artillería Antiaérea era mucho más modesta y contaba solamente con cañones de 20 mm., con un radar de vigilancia de la Fuerza Aérea y una sección de cañones

de 35 mm., con un director de tiro del Ejército. Recién el 9 de mayo se agregaron dos lanzadores de misiles SAM 7 Strela.

Así se llegó al 30 de abril, en un estado permanente de alerta. La posibilidad de entrar en combate era inminente. Se repasaron todos los procedimientos, inclusive los de evacuación de heridos. No había movimientos imprevistos. La mayor preocupación era el riesgo de derribar un avión amigo con el propio fuego de artillería debido a las características de las operaciones aéreas que se desarrollaban en el Teatro de Operaciones Malvinas.

NÓMINA DEL PERSONAL MILITAR SUPERIOR Y SUBALTERNO DEL GRUPO 1 DE ARTILLERÍA ANTIAÉREA QUE ESTUVIERON DESPLEGADOS EN PUERTO ARGENTINO, DARWIN Y BASES CONTINENTALES[1]

B.A.M. "Mar del Plata"
Primera dotación
1. Mayor Hugo MAIORANO
2. Capitán Rodolfo Savoia
3. 1er Teniente Oscar SPATH
4. Teniente Jorge REYES
5. Alférez Pedro IRAIZOZ
6. Suboficial Principal Antonio LEDESMA
7. Suboficial Ayudante Arnoldo ALASINO
8. Cabo Principal Omar RIVAROLA
9. Cabo Principal Eduardo MOLINA
10. Cabo Principal Aníbal CARDOZO
11. Cabo Principal Carlos MANCILLA
12. Cabo Principal Miguel PEDERNERA
13. Cabo 1º Oscar REPIZO
14. Cabo Rubén ALBORNOZ
15. Cabo Walter RIVOIRA
16. Cabo José MARTÍNEZ
17. Cabo José RIQUELME

Segunda dotación
1. Capitán Miguel AGUILAR
2. 1er Teniente Marcos ZUPANO
3. Suboficial Principal Antonio GEIGES
4. Suboficial Principal Jesús VERÓN
5. Suboficial Ayudante Rómulo Rómulo ITURBE
6. Suboficial Auxiliar Héctor CABALLERO
7. Cabo Principal Víctor FERNÁNDEZ
8. Cabo Principal Raúl VILLALTA
9. Cabo Principal Mauricio LÓPEZ
10. Cabo Principal Carlos RODRÍGUEZ

---

[1] Archivo de la Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea.

B.A.M. "Río Gallegos"
Primera dotación
1. 1er Teniente Alberto DALVEZ
2. Suboficial Mayor Hugo GÓMEZ
3. Cabo Principal Carlos ALMADA
4. Cabo Principal Diego BARTIS
5. Cabo 1º Omar CANESINI
6. Cabo Daniel LOYOLA
7. Cabo Sergio CHAZARRETA
8. Cabo Julio SÁNCHEZ
9. Cabo José RUIZ
10. Cabo Edgardo REMORINO
11. Cabo José HERNÁNDEZ

Segunda dotación
1. 1er Teniente Ángel VILLANO
2. Suboficial Auxiliar Ramón MARTÍNEZ
3. Cabo Principal Horacio ANAYA
4. Cabo Principal Carlos VERA
5. Cabo 1º Carlos MANCINI
6. Cabo 1º Natalio PIRANI
7. Cabo 1º Hugo MANCINI
8. Cabo 1º Rubén BILLONDO
9. Cabo Carlos MUÑOZ
10. Cabo Paulino SOTO

SAM 7
1. 1er Teniente Jaime UGARTE
2. Alférez Walter GARAY
3. Suboficial Principal Vicente SÁNCHEZ
4. Cabo Principal Roberto BEVILAQUA
5. Cabo 1º Fernando CONTRERAS
6. Cabo 1º Edgardo ALONSO
7. Cabo Carlos PEIRONE
8. Cabo Jorge ENCINAS

Base Aérea Militar "Cóndor" (Darwin)
1. Teniente Darío VALAZZA
2. Alférez Arnaldo FAVRE
3. Suboficial Principal Carlos FORNI
4. Suboficial Auxiliar Carmelo DOMINA
5. Cabo1º Ricardo GALANTI
6. Cabo 1º Elvio GIANINI
7. Cabo 1º José CHICONE
8. Cabo 1º Diego DEGIUSTI
9. Cabo Omar HEREDIA
10. Cabo Lorenzo CORRADI

EN EL CONTINENTE

IX BRIGADA AÉREA
1. Teniente Agustín CRUZ
2. Alférez Luis MANINO
3. Alférez Sergio HEREDIA
4. Cabo 1º Juan CONTRERAS
5. Cabo 1º Ramón LUJÁN
6. Cabo Oscar PEREYRA
7. Cabo Ramón FERNÁNDEZ

SANTA CRUZ
1. 1er Teniente Oscar SARMIENTO
2. Alférez Roberto PIQUERAS
3. Suboficial Auxiliar Enrique RODRÍGUEZ
4. Cabo Principal Lauro ALBARRACÍN
5. Cabo 1º Walter DÍAZ
6. Cabo 1º Víctor FLORES
7. Cabo Roberto BOCCO
8. Cabo Juan REYNOSO
9. Cabo Luis MONTIVERO

Base Aérea Militar "Río Gallegos"
1. 1er Teniente Edgar GIBAUD
2. Alférez Raúl MINUETT
3. Suboficial Mayor Pedro VARELA
4. Suboficial Ayudante Carlos TISSERA
5. Suboficial Auxiliar Antonio ESPIN

Por la Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la FAA

Soviet Naval Activities Outside Home Waters in 1985

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CIA/SOV 86-10047C

Soviet Naval Activities Outside Home Waters in 1985

A Research Paper

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1999

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SOV 86-10047C

October 1986

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Soviet Naval Activities Outside Home Waters in 1985

A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by , Office of Soviet Analysis, with contributions from and of SOVA. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to

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Soviet Naval Activities Outside Home Waters in 1985

Summary

Information available as of 31 January 1986 was used in this report.

Out-of-area activities in the calendar year 1985 were highlighted by the following operations that have implications for wartime:

- Antisubmarine warfare (ASW) operations off the US east and west coasts that involved a record number of Victor-class submarines in areas where the Soviets probably expect US ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) to operate.
- Large-scale exercises in the Atlantic and the Pacific that featured the most elaborate depiction to date of US naval strategy—as the Soviets see it—and that continue a trend toward extending the area where the Soviet Navy plans to engage Western naval forces in wartime.
- Increased operation of naval aircraft from airfields in Libya and Syria to monitor Western naval forces.
- Continued development of the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay, and the South China Sea Squadron's first observed complex exercise, which emphasized anticarrier strike operations.

Despite these developments, the level of Soviet out-of-area naval operations, as measured by ship-day statistics—the presence of one ship away from home waters for one day—remained limited to about 10 percent of the Navy's available units as a daily average. The Soviet naval presence outside home waters in 1985 decreased about 5 percent from the record level achieved in 1984. Soviet naval presence increased slightly in the Mediterranean and South China Seas; remained about the same in the Caribbean Sea, West African waters, and the Atlantic Ocean; and declined in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

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Contents

	Page
Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Atlantic Ocean	1
Submarine Operations Off the US East Coast	1
Hydrographic Ship Investigations in Baffin Bay	2
Major Western Fleets Exercise	3
Caribbean Sea	4
West African Waters	4
Mediterranean Sea	6
Indian Ocean	7
Pacific Ocean	8
South China Sea	9
Special Analysis: Wartime Operations of the Soviet Navy in the South China Sea	9
Initial Forces and Capabilities	9
Current Forces and Capabilities	10
Current Trends in Exercises	11
Significance	13
Attacking US Bases in the Philippines	13
SLOC Interdiction	13
Future Developments	13
Aviation	15
Air Defense	15
Surface Combatants	15
General Purpose Submarines	15

Appendixes

A.	Overseas Facilities and Anchorages Used by Soviet Naval Forces	17
B.	Deployment Areas and 1985 Ship-Days of Soviet Naval Forces Outside Home Waters	19

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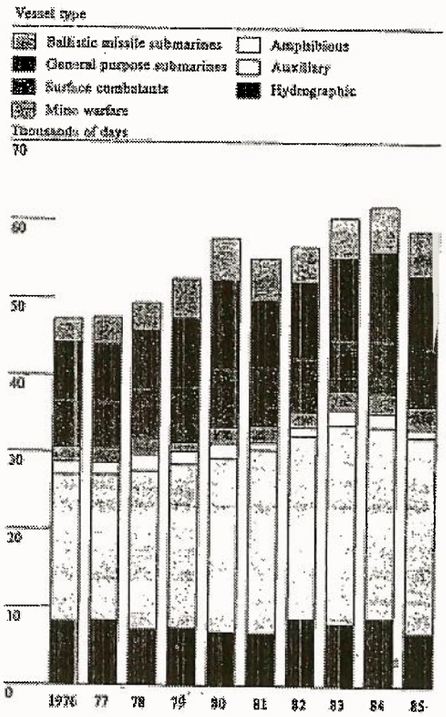
Measuring Soviet Naval Presence

A ship-day—the presence of one ship away from home waters for one day—is the traditional way to measure the Soviet naval presence outside home waters. Averaging ship-days, however, can be misleading if the following considerations are not taken into account:

- *Yearly statistics count each Soviet unit equally, regardless of combat capability. In 1985, more than 40 percent of Soviet naval ship-days was represented by auxiliaries such as yard craft, repair ships, and submarine tenders, with another 12 percent represented by research vessels, and missile testing and space-support ships.*
- *The statistics do not necessarily reflect changes in operational practice that could affect war-fighting capabilities.*
- *The figures do not differentiate between days at sea and days in foreign ports or sheltered anchorages.*
- *Ships in transit for sea trials or interfleet transfer are counted, even though they may perform limited operational functions or none at all.*
- *The Soviet Navy must commit ships to maintenance before, after, and sometimes during overseas deployments to maintain out-of-area force levels. Thus, the ship-day count does not reflect the total time involved in supporting distant naval operations.*

Soviet out-of-area deployments attract significant attention, yet on a daily average they involve under 10 percent of the Soviet Navy. In 1985 the Navy deployed a daily average of 21 surface combatants and 15 general purpose submarines—or about 5 percent of the combatant inventory and about 10 percent of the general purpose submarines.

Figure 1
Soviet Ship-Days in Distant Waters, 1976–85



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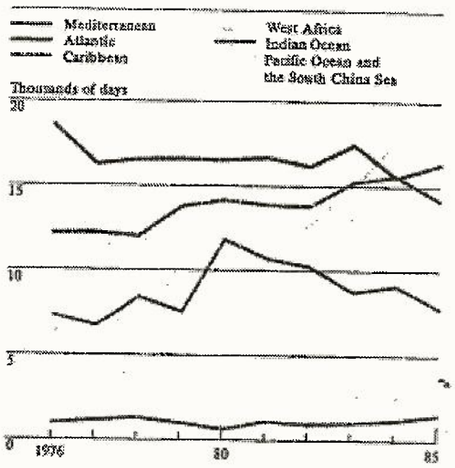
Soviet Naval Activities Outside Home Waters in 1985

Introduction

The Soviet naval presence outside home waters in 1985 decreased from the preceding year's record level of nearly 62,000 ship-days to about 59,000 ship-days (see figure 1). (We use the yearly tabulation of ship-days—the presence of one ship away from home waters for one day—to compare deployment levels with those of preceding years and to identify significant changes in deployment patterns.) Soviet naval presence increased slightly in the Mediterranean and South China Seas, remained about the same in the Caribbean Sea, West African waters, and the Atlantic Ocean, and declined in the Pacific and Indian Oceans (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Soviet Ship-Days in Distant Waters, by Region, 1976-85



Atlantic Ocean

Analysis of ship-days data indicates the overall Soviet naval presence in the open Atlantic for 1985 remained about the same as in recent years (see figure 3).

[redacted] and in July by the first appearance ever in Baffin Bay of a Soviet naval vessel—a hydrographic research vessel that may have been investigating the area for potential use by Soviet submarines.

Submarine Operations Off the US East Coast

A force of five Victor-class nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), an intelligence collection ship (AGI), a hydrographic research ship (AGS), and four Bear F long-range antisubmarine warfare (ASW) aircraft (operating out of Cuba) deployed from their Northern Fleet bases in early June to an area generally northeast of Bermuda (see figure 4).

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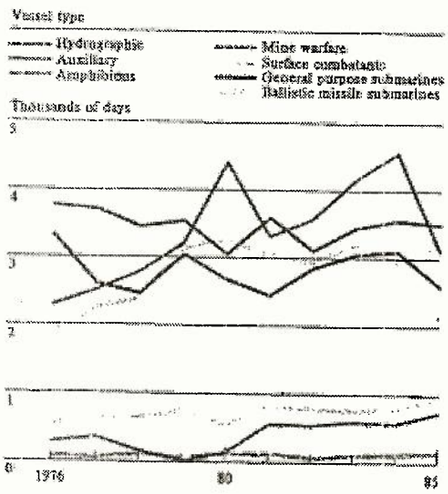
Figure 3
Soviet Ship-Days in the Atlantic Ocean, 1976-85*



* Includes Norwegian Sea.

with the results.[redacted] We believe, therefore, that it is unlikely that regular anti-SSBN patrols off the US coasts will be resumed until such time as qualitative improvements in Soviet SSNs alter the Soviets' perceptions of their chances for success. We are not certain whether the Soviets intend additional trials of anti-SSBN operations by groups of submarines.[redacted]

Although the Soviets continue to patrol Yankee- and Delta-class SSBNs close to the US coasts,[redacted]

This is due in part to a reduction in the number of available Northern Fleet Yankee-class SSBNs, which the Soviets continued to dismantle in compliance with arms control requirements. There was no significant change in the overall Northern Fleet SSBN presence in terms of ship-days for 1985.

Hydrographic Ship Investigations in Baffin Bay

The same Soviet hydrographic ship that participated in the June ASW operations off the US east coast[redacted] operating in Baffin Bay in July.[redacted]

Soviet writings acknowledge the enormous firepower present in even a single Western SSBN and recognize the desirability of attacking such units before they fire their missiles.[redacted]

Despite the high priority that the Soviets give this mission, the acoustic disadvantages of their submarines still limit their capability to carry it out.[redacted]

[redacted] that the Navy was not satisfied

The Soviets may have been investigating the Baffin Bay area for use by submarines. The Bay and its adjoining straits, which are ice-covered part of the [redacted] offer a number of potential strategic uses for Soviet submarines, including use as an SSBN or cruise missile patrol area. This is the first known operation by the Soviet Navy in Baffin Bay.

[redacted]

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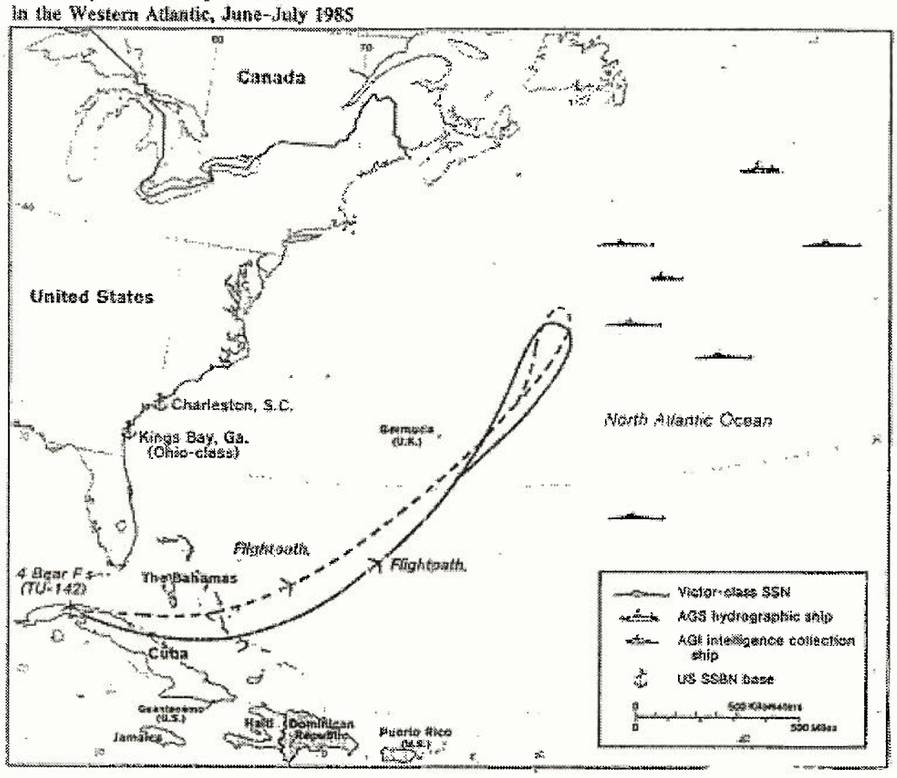
Figure 4
Soviet Open-Ocean Operations
in the Western Atlantic, June-July 1985



Major Western Fleets Exercise
A large exercise conducted in the North Atlantic Ocean and Norwegian Sea [redacted]

The exercise, [redacted] was carried out in two phases. Phase one emphasized ASW and reconnaissance:

[redacted]

Approximately 80 ships, [redacted] from the USSR's three western fleets participated

[redacted]

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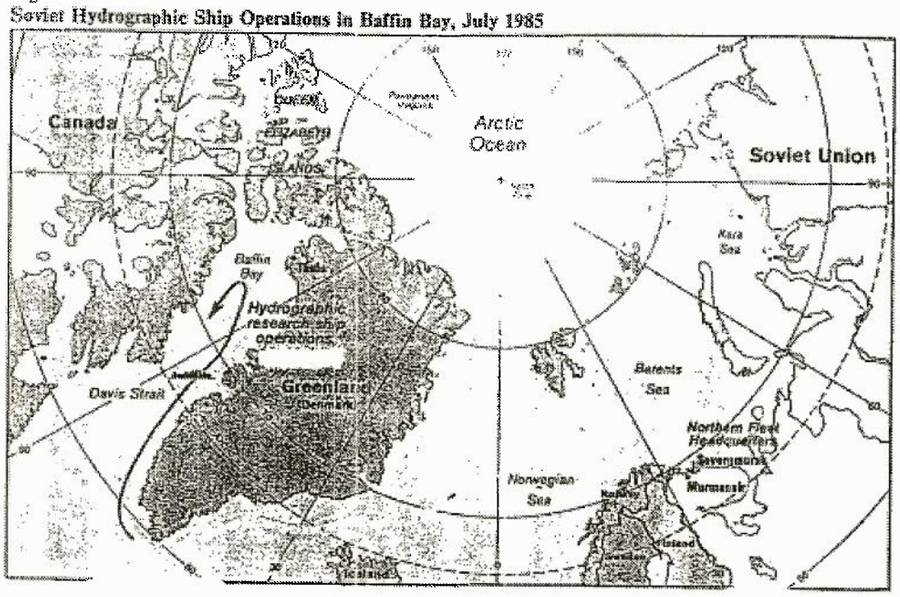
Figure 5
Soviet Hydrographic Ship Operations in Baffin Bay, July 1985



Phase two emphasized antisurface warfare:

This exercise probably was designed as a test of the Northern Fleet's ability to handle a multiple carrier battle group threat.

Caribbean Sea

There were no significant changes in Soviet naval presence levels and no unusual operations in the Caribbean in 1985 (see figure 7). Two Soviet naval task groups deployed to Cuba, marking the 24th and 25th such deployments.

West African Waters

The Soviet Navy maintained its small West African patrol in 1985 at about the same level as in 1984—one minor surface combatant, one minesweeper, and an occasional diesel-powered general purpose submarine

Figure 6
Soviet Naval Exercises in the North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea in the July 1985

Figure 7
Soviet Ship-Days in the Caribbean Sea, 1976-85

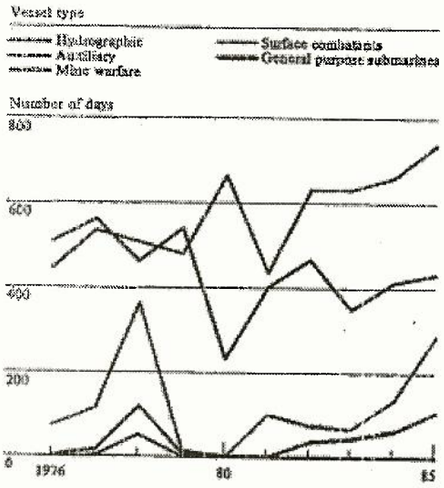
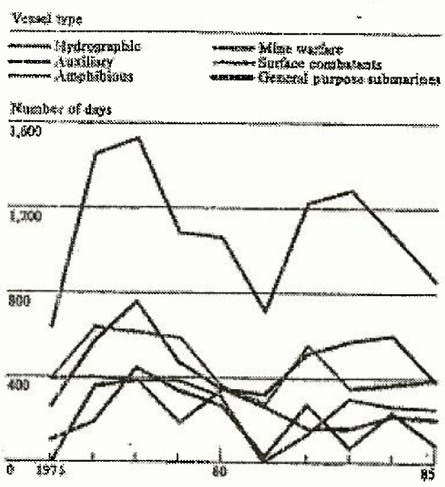


Figure 8
Soviet Ship-Days Off West Africa, 1976-85



(see figure 8). This patrol was created in 1971 in response to the seizure of Soviet fishing vessels by the Ghanaian Navy for violations of fishing regulations. In October 1985, Moroccan patrol boats detained a Soviet fish factory ship for fishing without a license. This was the first such incident since a Moroccan seizure in 1981.

The wartime utility of a typical West African patrol's combatants would be limited by its small size and lack of adequate logistic support and ordnance reloads. Bear D reconnaissance aircraft deployed to Luanda in wartime would be unable to reach the major cross-Atlantic sea lanes used by US forces and shipping.

Mediterranean Sea

The Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean in 1985 increased slightly over the 1984 level (see figure 9)

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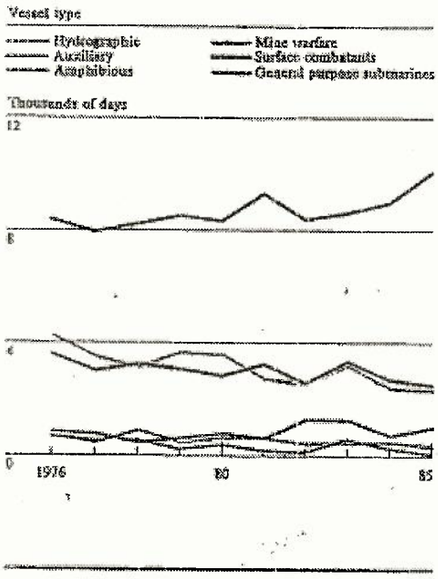
Figure 9
Soviet Ship-Days in the Mediterranean Sea, 1976-85



About two-thirds of a Soviet ship's time is spent at anchor.

The Soviets increased their use of Libya and Syria for the forward deployment of naval aircraft, thereby improving their capability to monitor the eastern and central Mediterranean.

US carrier pilots identified two of the Badgers as photoreconnaissance models, and the third probably was used as a communications relay platform.

If Syria or Libya were to continue to permit Soviet access to their airfields during the period of tensions preceding a NATO–Warsaw Pact war, the Soviet Navy would have a particularly valuable, although exposed, asset. Reconnaissance flights from these bases could help track Western naval forces for an initial strike. If Western aircraft chose to deny the Soviets use of the air, however, there is little they could do to continue operations because they would lack adequate fighter cover.

Indian Ocean

In 1985 the size of the Indian Ocean squadron decreased about 13.5 percent, bringing it down to a level comparable to that in the late 1970s before the Soviet and Western naval reinforcement of the region (see figure 10). The change in size reflects only minor differences in the composition of the squadron from the previous year, however. The presence of general purpose submarines increased slightly from two to an average of two or three, although the Soviets maintained the daily presence typical in 1984 of a single nuclear-powered, guided-missile unit and a diesel torpedo attack unit. The average number of surface combatants present declined from three ships to two. The presence of auxiliaries and amphibious and mine warfare units changed very little. The reduction in the number of research ships—from four or five on the average to two or three—accounts for much of the overall decline in the size of the squadron.

The squadron's unusually low level of activity continued in 1985, except for

squadron units made show-the-flag and replenishment port calls in several littoral nations, most notably in Seychelles, where visits in support of the René regime have become almost routine.

The Soviets' efforts to expand their naval access to Indian Ocean nations continued in 1985 but without any significant known success. In early 1985, the first and only visit of the Soviet May ASW aircraft to Mozambique occurred.

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Figure 10
Soviet Ship-Days in the Indian Ocean, 1976-85

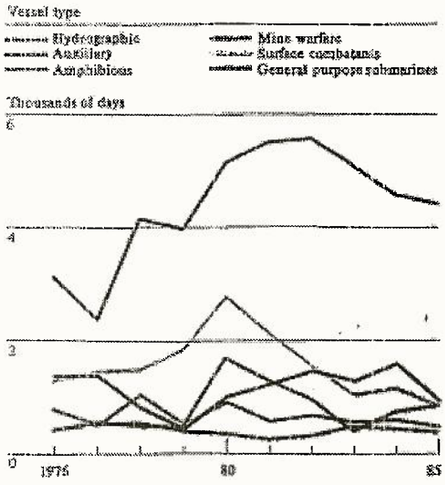
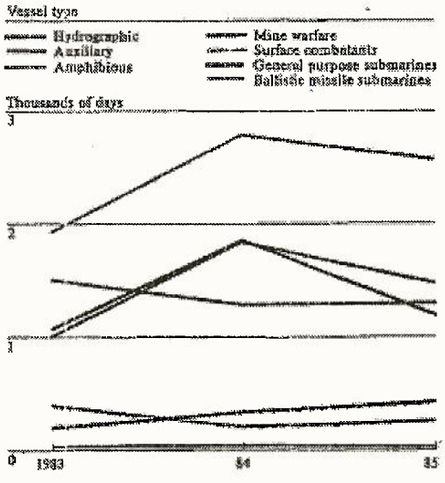


Figure 11
Soviet Ship-Days in the Pacific Ocean, 1983-85*



* Excludes the South China Sea.

Two May aircraft remained on continuous deployment at Al Anad Airfield in South Yemen, as in the past. The Soviets have not sent Mays back to Johannes IV Airfield in Ethiopia, where two Mays were present before the rebel attack in May 1984 that damaged or destroyed both aircraft. Another successful rebel attack against the airfield occurred in 1985, destroying a number of Ethiopian aircraft. Renewal of Soviet May operations from Johannes IV thus seems even more unlikely in the near future.

Pacific Ocean

Soviet out-of-area ship-days in the open Pacific decreased 13 percent in 1985. The presence of general purpose submarines—which had risen substantially in 1984—fell by almost 20 percent. The drop reflected fewer submarine transits to and from Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. A decline in the average presence of research ships in the Pacific, from five units down to three or four units, also helped lower the Pacific total (see figure 11; statistics on the Pacific ship-days have been calculated for only 1983-85).

A large-scale Soviet Pacific Fleet exercise in April 1985 contained an unusually high amount of out-of-area activity.

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Special Analysis: Wartime Operations of the Soviet Navy in the South China Sea

Initial Forces and Capabilities

The Soviets' naval operations in the South China Sea from late 1979 to 1983 grew from small naval task groups making occasional port calls and the periodic deployment of a pair of Bear aircraft to the continuous presence of two or three submarines, several surface combatants, a number of auxiliaries, and a pair each of Bear D and Bear F aircraft. Some support facilities were obtained at Cam Ranh Bay during this period, but auxiliaries provided most of the services at the port while naval transport aircraft provided the support for the Bears at the airfield.

Exercise activity by Soviet naval forces in the South China Sea during this period was rudimentary and one dimensional.

As in other Soviet naval formations deployed outside Soviet homewaters, activity was limited by Western standards: exercises occurred only periodically, training was low key, and operational naval patrols and air missions in the South China Sea region generally followed established patterns.

This force was adequate, however, to undertake some of the missions that the Soviets would assign to out-of-area forces during the transition to and early phases of a US-Soviet war. The most important of these, and one common to out-of-area units, would be the acquisition of up-to-date intelligence and targeting data on major US and allied naval forces, such as aircraft carriers and platforms equipped with cruise missiles—potential nuclear threats to the Soviet homeland.

Another mission that would be assigned to out-of-area forces probably would be attacks on allied naval or merchant shipping. Soviet exercises have demonstrated planning for attacks against Western forces—sometimes in conjunction with long-range strike aircraft from the Soviet Union—by the Soviet naval squadrons in the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The South China Sea force in the early 1980s

South China Sea

Improvements to and expansion of the facilities at Cam Ranh Bay in 1985, along with recent developments in the command and control of naval forces based there, that the South China Sea force has become a squadron formation. These developments also indicate that the Soviets believe the squadron at Cam Ranh Bay has a viable regional role in conducting wartime operations against US and Western naval forces. Because of the significance of the squadron's capability, we examine its growth over the last seven years in the following section

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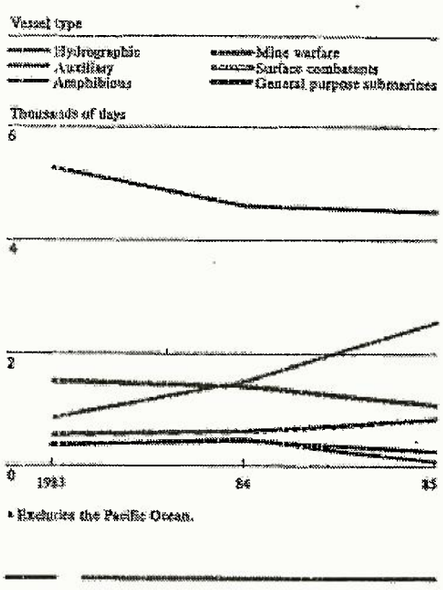
did not have the benefit of strike aircraft, however, and probably would have been capable of limited interdiction of sea lines of communication (SLOC) only in the absence of significant Western assets. The lack of adequate support facilities for wartime use in all distant area formations, including Cam Ranh before the buildup, further limited the viability of this force for combat with Western forces and its ability to sustain a campaign against Western SLOCs beyond a short period.

A second general mission for out-of-area formations almost certainly would be to delay and divert Western naval and air forces from higher priority missions nearer the Soviet Union. The force present at Cam Ranh in the early 1980s, though small, might have been sufficient to divert significant Western forces, such as one or more aircraft carrier battle groups or US Air Force formations.

Current Forces and Capabilities

During 1985 the South China Sea naval squadron's size differed little from that of 1984 (see figure 12). The composition of this force generally matched that seen in the second half of 1984, one major and six minor combatants, about 12 or more auxiliary ships, plus small numbers of mine warfare, amphibious, and hydrographic research ships. The average number of general purpose submarines present dropped in 1985, however, down from an average of four to only three.

Figure 12
Soviet Ship-Days in the South China Sea, 1983-85*



* Excludes the Pacific Ocean.

The composition of the naval aircraft at Cam Ranh remained the same as in the preceding year. Sixteen Badger bomber and support aircraft—which arrived in 1983 and 1984—were present as were four Bear F ASW and four Bear D reconnaissance aircraft. Fourteen Flogger fighters also remained posted there.

Construction and renovation continued at Cam Ranh in support of the airfield and the port [redacted] including construction of an earthen causeway for a new Soviet floating pier. This pier will be the seventh pier at Cam Ranh and the fifth pier the Soviets have built. When complete, the pier will help alleviate the crowding the port facility has experienced in the last few years.

Current Trends in Exercises
In 1985 the South China Sea squadron staged its first observed complex exercise as an integrated unit, emphasizing anticarrier operations [redacted]

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Figure 14
Soviet Anticarrier Exercise in the South China Sea, February 1985

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The presence of the Midway battle group gave the South China Sea squadron the opportunity to simulate anticarrier warfare—one of the primary wartime missions of Soviet naval forces—against a real target. According to Soviet doctrine and exercises, however, a significantly larger force—including two or more regiments of missile-equipped aircraft, submarines, and surface-launched antiship cruise missiles—would be required for a successful attack on a Western carrier battle group.

Significance

We believe that the Soviets regard most units deployed to distant waters in wartime to be expendable, particularly in exchange for the delay, diversion, or destruction of Western carriers or other nuclear-capable units far from the Soviet homeland and the operating areas of SSBNs. If such Western units were not in the region at the onset of hostilities, we believe that the squadron would still remain in the South China Sea. If Cam Ranh were operational, the force could undertake some limited offensive operations, not only for the damage they might cause, but to increase the possible diversion of Western forces to the region, for example, by attacking US bases in the Philippines and SLOC interdiction.

Attacking US Bases in the Philippines. The Badger squadron could attempt a raid or series of raids, depending on the rate of casualties, against the US bases using bombs against land targets, antiship missiles against ships at Subic Bay, or mines against Subic, other ports, and Philippine waters. The Badgers would be beyond the range of fighter escort by the Floggers at Cam Ranh.

SLOC Interdiction. The Badgers could mount anti-SLOC strikes against shipping in the region. The Badgers and the Bear F ASW aircraft, as well as submarines and surface units at Cam Ranh, could undertake minelaying—both in defense of Cam Ranh and against sea lanes and straits. General purpose submarines in the region could also be used in an anti-SLOC role, although the sustainability of such a campaign depends on the continued existence of support auxiliaries at Cam Ranh for replenishment and ordnance resupply. (

Alternatively, without the presence of a carrier or other priority targets, the Soviets could elect a more passive strategy, dispersing their own forces to alternate airfields, ports, anchorages, or operating areas. Limited anti-SLOC missions could be a part of this strategy, via mining or submarine attack. The Soviets would hope to tie down Western forces that might already be in the area, such as ASW aircraft and nuclear attack submarines, and potential reinforcements to the area—tactical air formations or aircraft carriers for example—for a not inconsiderable amount of time.

We believe that in any likely scenario at the onset of a US-Soviet war the Soviets would probably have more to gain by leaving the squadron in the South China Sea than by attempting to pull it back to the main Pacific Fleet wartime operation areas before or during hostilities. The squadron is only a fraction of the force available to the Pacific theater in wartime and consists mainly of older, less capable platforms. The relative perception of the capability of the force, however, is magnified by its deployment to the South China Sea. This is especially the case because the future of US bases in the region may be in doubt.

Future Developments

The command and control, communications, intelligence, and logistic facilities at Cam Ranh Bay are taking on a more permanent nature, suggesting the Soviets intend to make a long-term commitment to maintaining a naval presence in the region.

We believe that the gradual improvement of forces and support structure at Cam Ranh will continue.

Most of the deployed forces, however, probably will continue to be older units or small numbers of newer, more capable types as modernization of the Pacific Fleet goes forward.

Aviation. The Soviets apparently view the current strength of the Badger unit at Cam Ranh to be adequate (see figure 15). The airfield could accommodate twice the number of Badgers deployed, and a number of Badgers are in storage in the Pacific Fleet. Although it is unlikely, future reinforcement, perhaps during a period of rising tensions preceding war, cannot be ruled out. Occasional staging of Pacific Fleet Backfire aircraft to Cam Ranh, as a temporary show of force as an example, is possible. It is unlikely that Backfires would be permanently stationed at Cam Ranh or be present there in wartime because they have higher priority missions. Constraints of numbers and missions make increasing the Bear D and F component at Cam Ranh unlikely also.

Air Defense. Increasing the number of fighter aircraft at Cam Ranh is a possibility. If the Soviets wish to upgrade the air defense of the base further, however, they might introduce Soviet surface-to-air missile units or equip the present Vietnamese air defense forces in the region with more modern systems.

Surface Combatants. The current pattern of assigning relatively small combatants to the squadron, such as Grisha and Petya light frigates and Nanuchka missile combatants, will probably continue. This reduces the need for larger surface combatants to deploy to Cam Ranh and may help to reduce the congestion in the port area.

General Purpose Submarines. The number of submarines at Cam Ranh has fluctuated between three and six in recent years, although on average only three submarines were present in 1985. We expect the current level of deployment of three to continue, both because the Soviets apparently view it as adequate and because our projected force estimates of the Soviet Pacific Fleet indicate the lack of extra submarines. The mix of antiship cruise missile submarines and torpedo attack diesel-powered submarines will also probably continue because of their availability and the flexibility they offer the Soviets for the various missions they may undertake in the region.

We do not believe that any or all of these possible developments would seriously alter the wartime capability or missions of the South China Sea squadron. The anticarrier warfare and anti-SLOC roles of the force would benefit from additional strike aircraft or submarines. The defense of Cam Ranh itself might improve substantially with deployment of more Soviet air defense units or equipment.

The expansion of logistic and support infrastructure at Cam Ranh will probably at least marginally increase the capability of the squadron. A major shift from floating auxiliary support to onshore support at the port would create more space for combatants and other nonsupport ships. This seems an unlikely investment for the Soviets to make, although the presence of auxiliary ships seems to be gradually declining as the buildup continues. Construction of extensive munitions storage facilities for the air unit at Cam Ranh would permit a greater number and variety of types of ordnance to be available, such as iron bombs, aerial mines, and chemical weapons, as well as antiship missiles.

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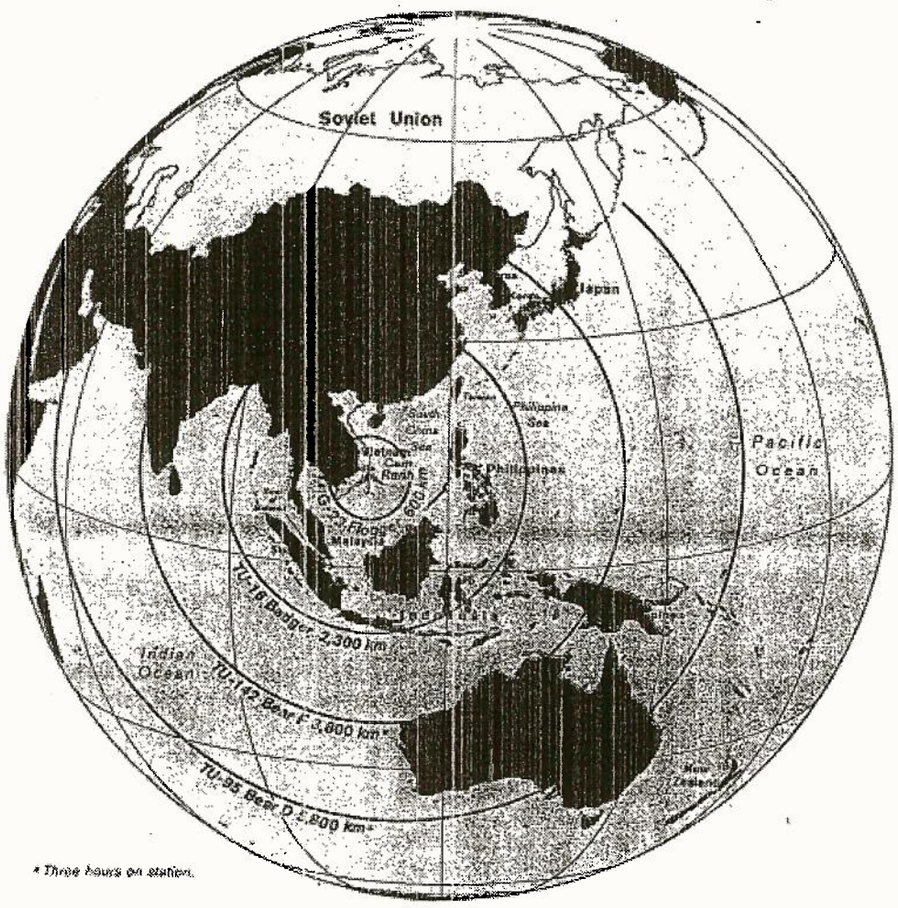
Figure 15
Soviet Naval Air Coverage From Vietnam



* Three hours on station.

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Appendix A

Overseas Facilities and Anchorages Used by Soviet Naval Forces

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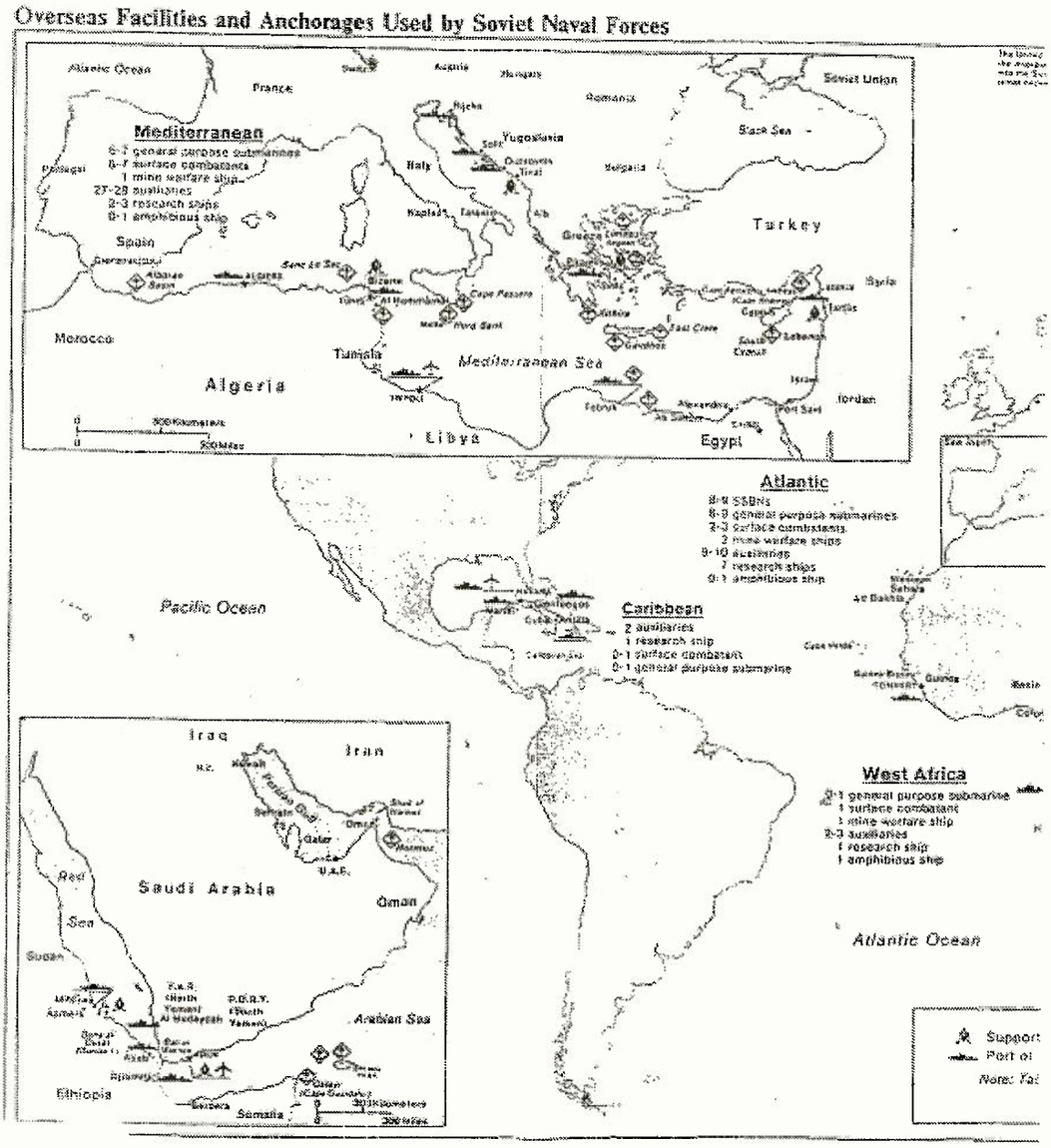
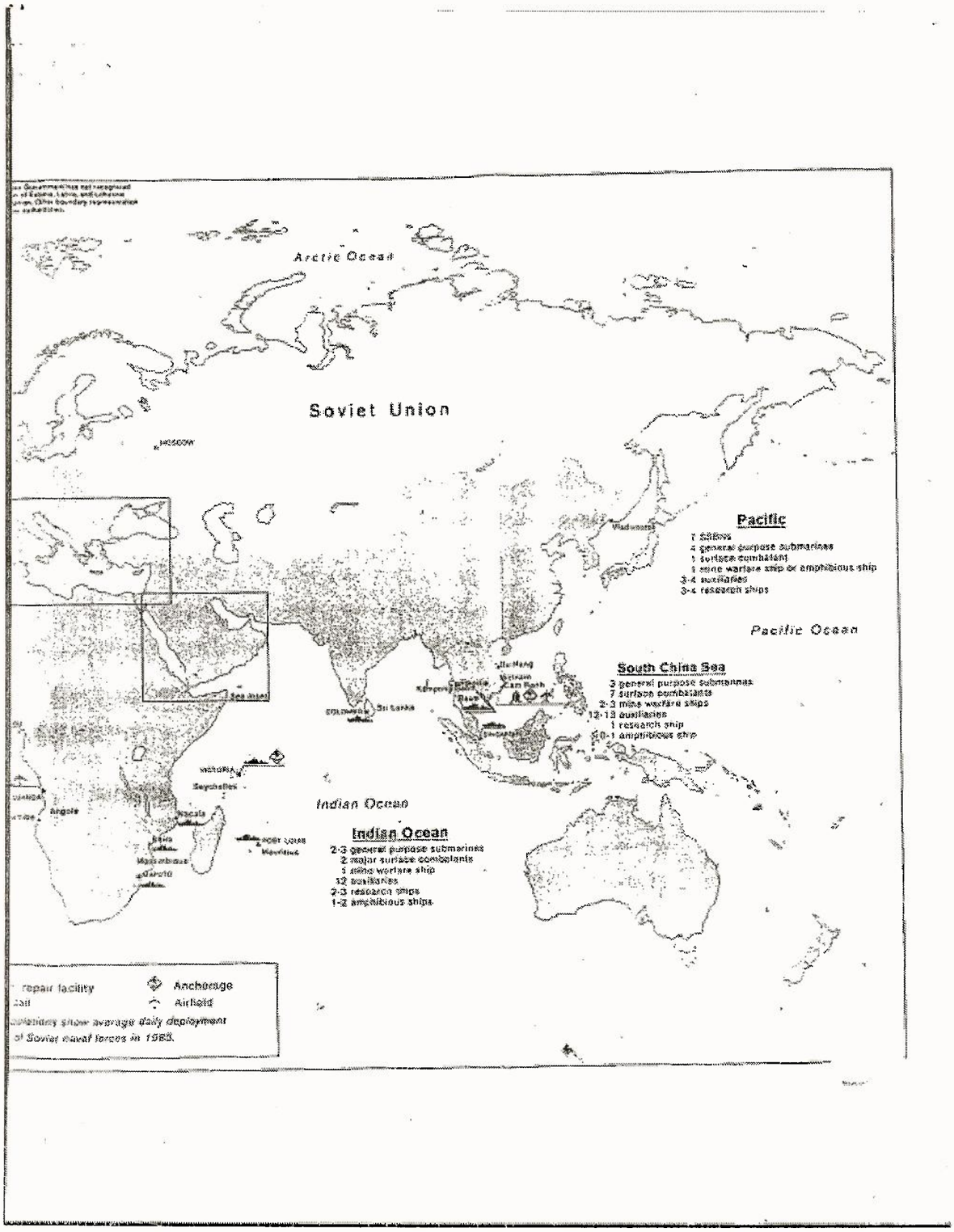
Overseas Facilities and Anchorages Used by Soviet Naval Forces




Arctic Ocean
Soviet Union
Moscow
Pacific
1 SSBNs
4 general purpose submarines
1 surface combatant
1 mine warfare ship or amphibious ship
3-4 auxiliaries
3-4 research ships
Pacific Ocean
South China Sea
3 general purpose submarines
7 surface combatants
2-3 mine warfare ships
12-13 auxiliaries
1 research ship
0-1 amphibious ship
Sri Lanka
Seychelles
Angola
Indian Ocean
Indian Ocean
2-3 general purpose submarines
2 major surface combatants
1 mine warfare ship
12 auxiliaries
2-3 research ships
1-2 amphibious ships
repair facility
Anchorage
Airfield
of Soviet naval forces in 1983.

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Appendix B

Deployment Areas and 1985 Ship-Days of Soviet Naval Forces Outside Home Waters

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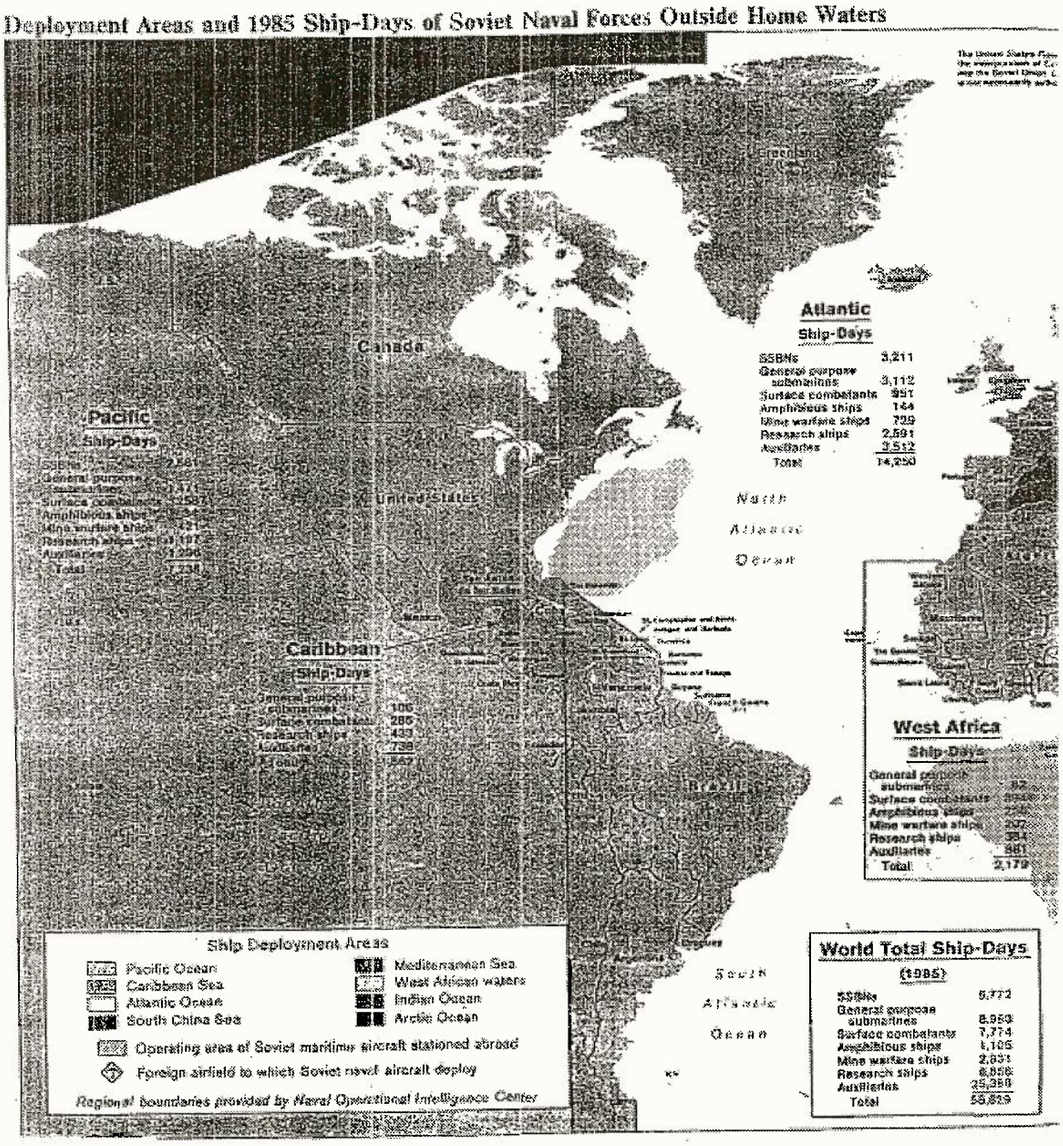
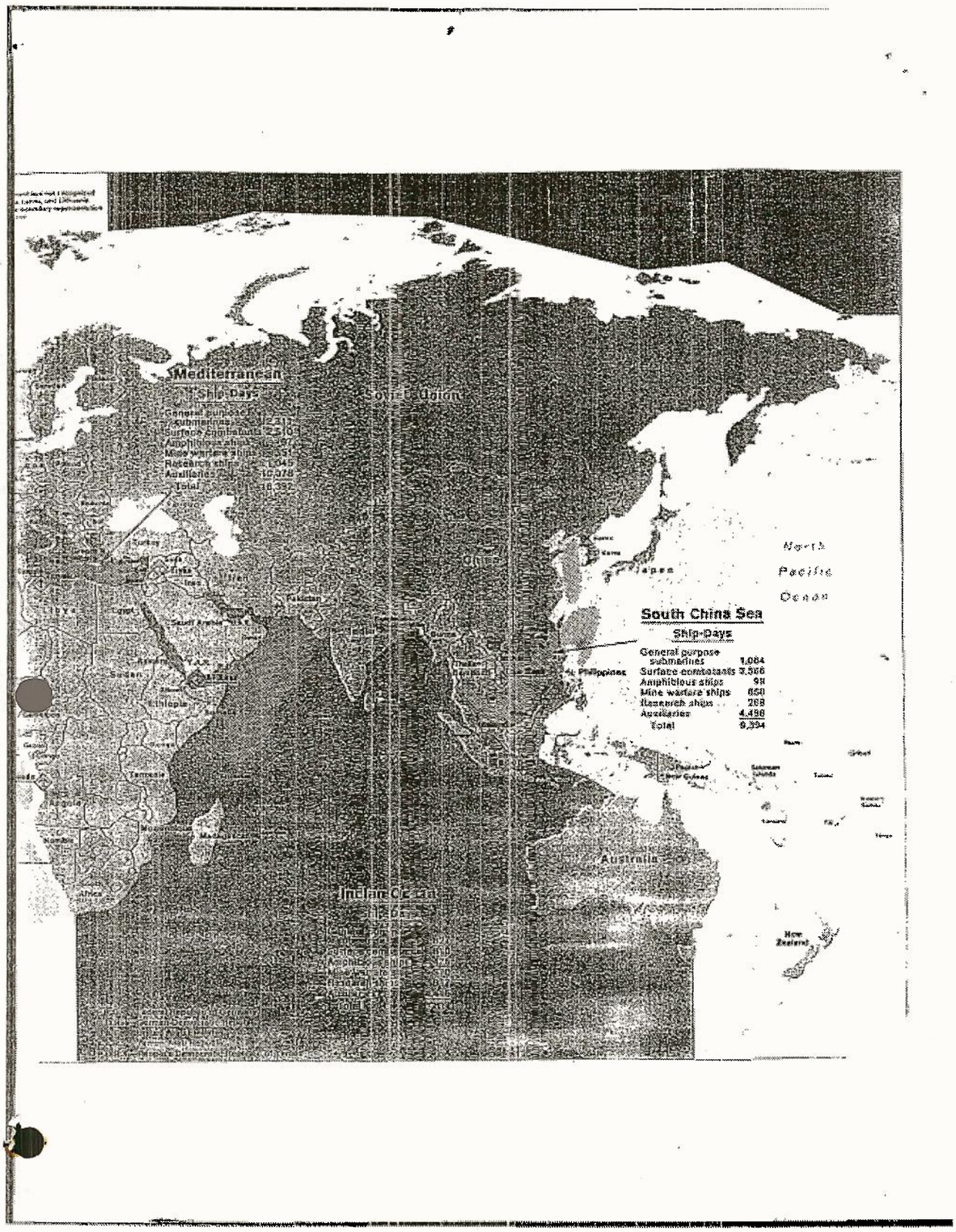
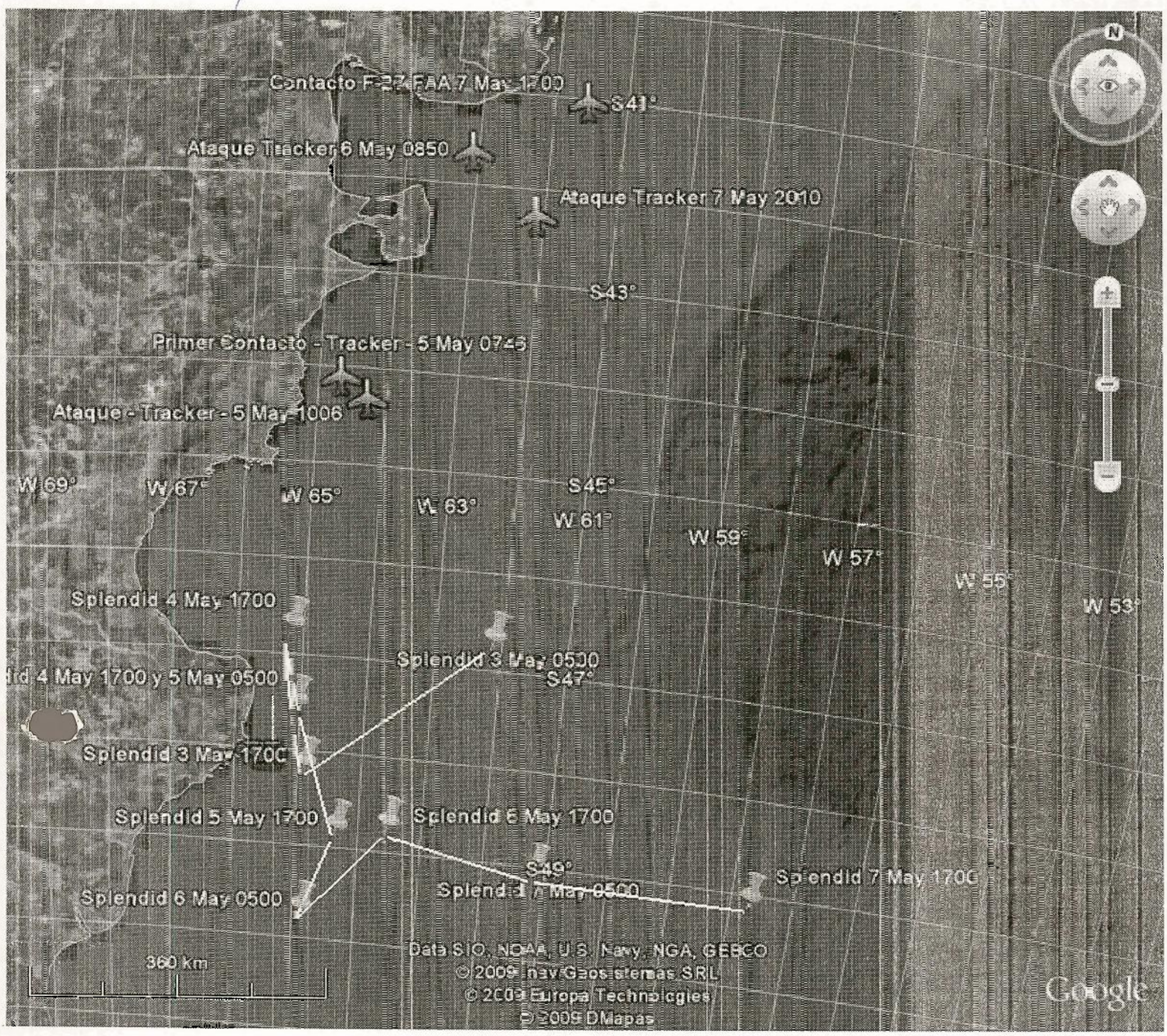
Deployment Areas and 1985 Ship-Days of Soviet Naval Forces Outside Home Waters




Mediterranean
Ship-Days
Soviet Union
North Pacific Ocean
South China Sea
Ship-Days
General purpose submarines 1,084
Surface combatants 3,506
Amphibious ships 91
Mine warfare ships 650
Research ships 268
Auxiliaries 4,496
Total 9,394
Australia
New Zealand

Submarino

Avistaje Titán Spartan


Contacto F-27 FAA 7 May 1700
S41°
Ataque Tracker 6 May 0850
Ataque Tracker 7 May 2010
S43°
Primer Contacto - Tracker - 5 May 0745
Ataque - Tracker - 5 May 1006
W 69°
W 67°
W 65°
W 63°
S45°
W 61°
W 59°
W 57°
W 55°
W 53°
Splendid 4 May 1700
Splendid 3 May 0500
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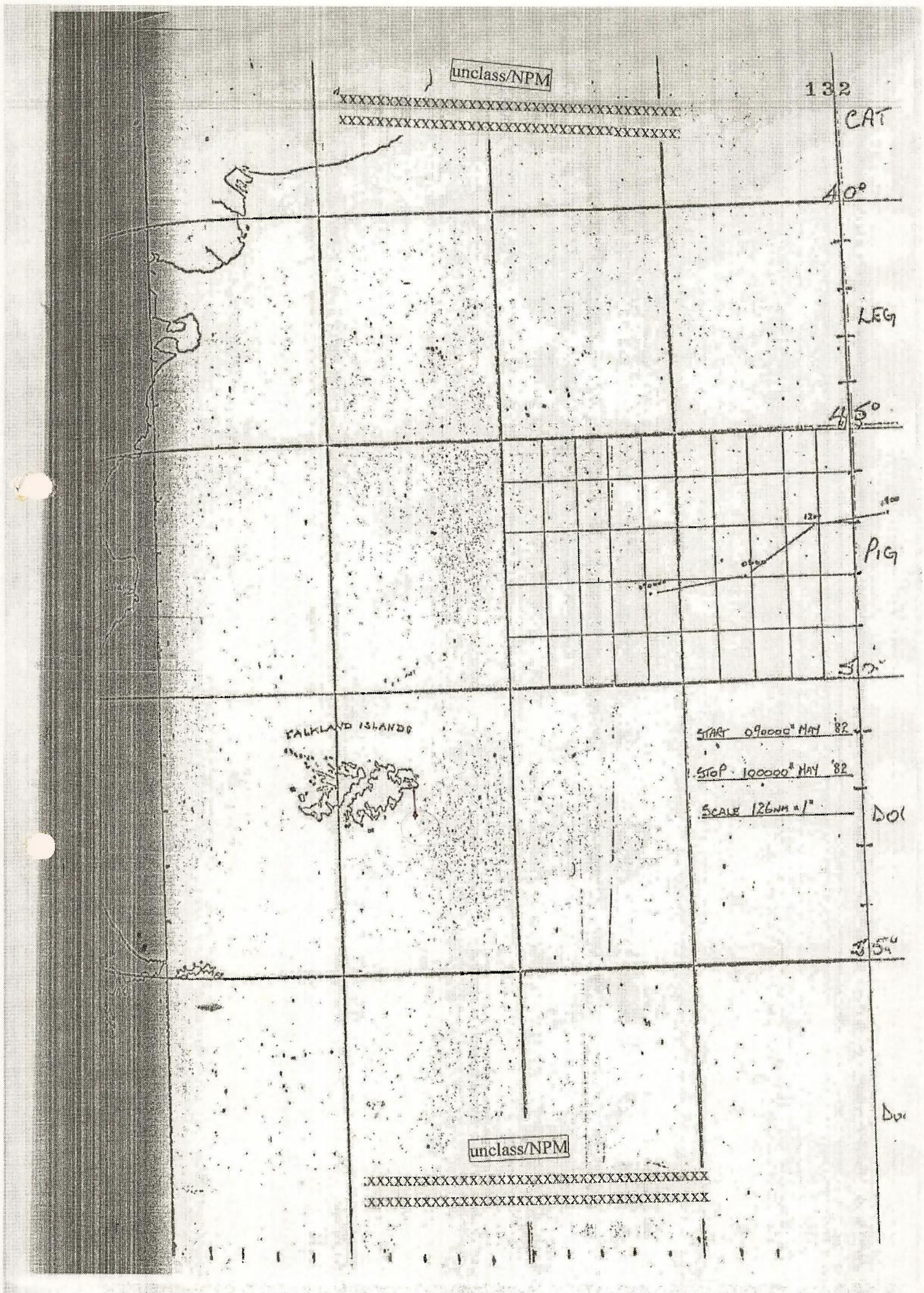
Splendid 6 May 1700
S49°
Splendid 7 May 1700
Splendid 6 May 0500
360 km
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
© 2009 navGeosistemas SRL
© 2009 Europa Technologies
© 2009 DMapas
Google

200 cargas de profundidad
30 Torpedos Mk 46 para anti submarino



Mariano P. Sciaroni

Investigador

Fuente Mariano P. Sciaroni investigador 17

Se encontraba ahora solo, en una zona que, se estimaba por sus características de profundidad, se encontraba vedada a los submarinos británicos.

Esa asunción, por supuesto, se encontraba equivocada.

En efecto, un avión de transporte Fokker F-27, matrícula T-43 de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina (vuelo "Titán"), que se encontraba realizando un vuelo de apoyo a la Fuerza de Tareas, reportó a las 17:00 hs el avistaje de un submarino a 150 millas de Puerto Belgrano y treinta millas a popa del Portaaviones.

Es decir a escasas horas de situarse para poder lanzar sobre el mismo.

El "Titán", que había despegado de Palomar a las 11:00 hs y no arribaría de vuelta allí hasta las 21:15 hs (luego de una serie de paradas para repostar) estaba al comando del experimentado Vicecomodoro Mario Andelique, completando la tripulación el Capitán Carmelo Salas, SM Amílcar Reyes, S. Aux. Alfredo Albertengo, C Dante Ramos y P Sup Fermín Dilacio.

El submarino había sido divisado por el piloto, copiloto y mecánico, informando que, en una segunda pasada a menos de 5000 pies sobre el submarino, este había ido a inmersión, indicando que previo a ello pudo distinguir estela, torreta y periscopio.

Ello motivó que decolara, 30 minutos después del avistaje, un Sea King hacia el punto dato, que se actualizó ahora a 60 millas del portaaviones

En tanto la tripulación del F-27 no se encontraba calificada para clasificar submarinos en superficie (para ello se requiere previamente realizar avistajes desde diferentes ángulos/alturas y con ello se califica para poder clasificar como "CERTSUB"), y ante la búsqueda infructuosa del helicóptero, se desechó el informe, comentando la tripulación del mismo, y en el viaje de vuelta, que los tripulantes de Fuerza Aérea habrían informado un falso contacto.

El experimentado operador de sonar del Sea King, el entonces TF Edgardo García rememora:

> *"En menos de 30 minutos habíamos decolado con el H3, pero teníamos dudas sobre ese submarino, dado que la tripulación del F27 no estaba calificada para clasificar submarinos en superficie.*
>
> *Por esta razón, y como buscamos y no se encontró nada, se desecho el avistaje de la Fuerza Aérea comentando que habrían avistado una ballena" (De entrevista con el CN Edgardo García)*

Efectivamente, sin desmerecer a la tripulación del Fokker, los marinos tenían razones para pensar que aún en tiempos de paz y en los ejercicios, se dan innumerables casos de errores de clasificación productos de ballenas, reflejos, ondas de mar y hasta anomalías magnéticas de origen terrestre, que provocan en el ojo humano o en los sensores, señales similares a la de los submarinos.

Y los falsos contactos se multiplican en tiempos de guerra.

Sin embargo, el avistaje por personal calificado es lo único que permite clasificar un contacto como submarino cierto.

Amén de ello, el "Titán" siguió volando hasta proximidades del canal de acceso a Bahía Blanca, donde informó un nuevo contacto, similar al que había informado anteriormente.

Para sorpresa de todos, el contacto que ahora informaba era el submarino ARA "Salta", que se estaba redesplegando hacia la Base Naval Mar del Plata para su alistamiento final.

De tal manera, la dotación del Fokker quedó calificada automáticamente... tomando mayor relevancia su anterior reporte.

Tal es así que, ulteriormente se decidió clasificar al contacto como un submarino cierto, o CERTSUB.

En atención a lo expuesto, amén de ordenársele al "Salta" el inmediato repliegue hacia aguas seguras, se decidió el decolaje de un S-2E, el que arribó al punto dato a las 1938, el que fue relevado en cuatro oportunidades, sembrándose tanto barreras LOFAR como desarrollándose búsqueda radar.

Si bien el área explorada fue aumentada de acuerdo al círculo máximo de posición estimada, no fue detectado el submarino avistado, dándose por finalizadas las acciones, respecto a este contacto, a las 2125.

Ahora bien, el submarino atacado era, sin duda alguna de acuerdo a información recientemente desclasificada, el HMS "Spartan"

El (S105) "HMS Spartan", al mando del Capitán de Fragata James Taylor, era, como el "Splendid" un moderno submarino nuclear de ataque de la clase Swiftsure que entró en servicio en el año 1979.

El HMS "Spartan" tuvo una partida temprana a la zona de operaciones, el día 1° de abril.

Cuarenta y ocho horas antes se encontraba participando en el Mar Mediterráneo, conjuntamente con otros buques que luego pondrían proa hacia Malvinas, de las ejercitaciones "Springtrain", ordenándosele que se dirigiera a Gibraltar para avituallarse y armarse con torpedos con cabeza de guerra, que fueron obtenidos del submarino HMS "Oracle".

Desde allí puso rumbo al sur, manteniendo una elevada velocidad de tránsito de 23 nudos.

Al llegar al área de operaciones, se le ordenó patrullar en aguas cercanas a las islas. Allí tuvo la oportunidad de observar, el día 14, el minado de Puerto Argentino por parte del buque auxiliar Forrest y del ARA "Isla de los Estados", no recibiendo autorización para atacarlos.

Durante las primeras fases se mantuvo patrullando dichas aguas, para ulteriormente reposicionarse fuera de las 12 millas de la costa argentina, tanto para bloquear cualquier intento de la Flota de Mar de abandonar las aguas territoriales, como para reportar el movimiento de aeronaves hacia la Task Force.

Como se dijo antes, el día 1° de mayo, se le ordenó buscar al portaaviones "25 de Mayo", informándosele que se encontraba a 100 millas de su posición, aunque su comandante se inhibió de enfilar hacia el blanco, en la inteligencia que se encontraba dentro del cuadrante vedado al HMS "Splendid".

Ello fue una constante en las primeras fases del conflicto. Si bien el submarino se encontraba en una posición al norte de las islas, por el sistema de "cajas" no podía acercarse al continente que, para dicha fecha, estaba asignado al submarino previamente citado.

El submarino fue uno de los primeros buques en retornar a puerto, arribando a Devonport luego de su patrulla de 13 semanas.

Para este día 7 de mayo, específicamente, se encontraba operando en las cercanías de Bahía Blanca, un área que previamente se le había vedado, ya que pertenecía entonces a un cuadrante a cargo del HMS "Splendid".

El sistema de cajas se había debido modificar, en tanto el submarino a cargo del CF Roger Lane-Nott experimentó ciertos problemas en uno de sus Turbo Generadores, que hicieron que debiera tomar rumbo este, fuera del radio de cobertura de la aviación argentina.

Para cubrir el vacío que dejaba el submarino con problemas, el "Spartan" habia pasado en pocos días, y sin solución de continuidad, desde el cuadrante al norte de las Islas Malvinas para finalmente patrullar las aguas al sudeste de Puerto Belgrano y más arriba.

En su informe, el comandante del submarino anotaba:

> *"6 de mayo. Circunnavegué una flota pesquera mientras navegaba a toda máquina hacia la nueva zona de patrulla Bahia Blanca, al sudeste de Puerto Belgrano." (de HMS Spartan – "Report of Proceedings")*

Para el 7 de mayo ya se encontraba en el área de operaciones que le fuere asignada, aunque no reportó contactos.

Sin embargo, algo le preocupaba realmente al CF James Taylor, y es que pudiera ser descubierto desde el aire, como sucedió, parece sin que el mismo lo supiera, este día.

En efecto, las condiciones del fondo marino y de la transparencia del agua en la zona, aumentaban las posibilidades de que un observador atento pudiera dar con el HMS "Spartan".

Tal es así que el siguiente día 8, anotó expresamente que:

> *"Patrulla antisuperficie en Bahía Blanca ... Actividad aérea enemiga (Tracker y Bandeirante) detectada por MAE. La claridad del agua, el fondo marino blanco y arenoso y las aguas someras se combinan para limitar mi operación durante el día. Mi plan es para adentrarme en aguas someras durante la noche y buscar en aguas más profundas durante el día" (de HMS Spartan - "Report of Proceedings")*

Sin embargo, como se dijo, ya había sido visto por el Fokker de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina. Y por suerte para él, se escabulló de la búsqueda posterior emprendida por la Aviación Naval.

Posiblemente nunca se haya enterado de que fue observado por una aeronave, en atención que navegaba si mostrar apéndices, es decir, su único contacto con el mundo exterior era el sonar. Y si bien este puede "escuchar" aeronaves a baja altura, lo cierto es que el tráfico marítimo en la zona posiblemente haya enmascarado a los motores turbohélices del "Titán".

En suma, el HMS "Spartan" puede considerarse afortunado, en tanto operó en aguas someras, fue detectado, y volvió sin un rasguño.

Demás está decir que, también en este caso, el esfuerzo antisubmarino de la Aviación Naval de la Armada Argentina (con la colaboración de la Fuerza Aérea) dio sus inmensos frutos.

En efecto, el submarino tuvo condicionada su capacidad para moverse y acechar. Específicamente, el HMS "Spartan" se veía limitado en su capacidad para: 1) Operar en horas de luz solar en aguas más cercanas a la costa, 2) Desplegar apéndices para realizar búsquedas visuales, barridos de radar y transmitir y recibir tráfico de radio.

Ello fue debido a la vigilancia aérea de la zona de operaciones, que el CF Taylor conocía perfectamente, ya que su equipo de vigilancia electrónica no cesaba de recibir señales de radar procedentes de aviones navales.

Si el HMS "Spartan" se hubiera mostrado más displicente en su disciplina frente a su enemigo, seguramente hubiera sido más veces detectado, y posiblemente atacado.

Es decir, el submarino tuvo que estar, por ello, con su "cabeza gacha". Ello posibilitó que el ARA "25 de Mayo" y su escolta se inmiscuyeran en su área de patrulla, lo sobrepasaran y siguieran su camino hacia el norte sin mayor interferencia.

De vuelta, si el HMS "Spartan" no se hubiera encontrado constreñido en su forma de actuar y patrullar, seguramente habría detectado al grupo de batalla argentino. Y posiblemente hundido al ARA "25 de Mayo", teniendo especialmente en cuenta que la tripulación se había entrenado especialmente en el mantenimiento y tiro de los torpedos Tigerfish, de más alcance que los viejos Mk. 8 que hundieron al CRBE.

Gonzalo → Sforzata/Sub TC-El

Altura OdP

Coventry

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Annex B to
12-12-2006-133020-CCG
dated 25 March 200

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

Telephone (Direct Dialling) 01-218 7165

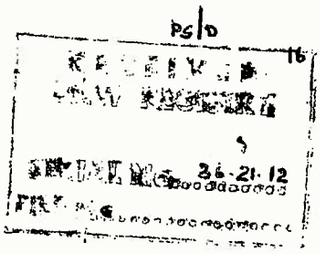
(Switchboard) 01-218 9000

From: A R M JAFFRAY CB., Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Navy)

Ref: 14/2/35(484)

21 December 1982

Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex HA6 3HP



Sir

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY

Reference: 520/239L dated 22 September 1982

1. I am commanded by the Admiralty Board of the Defence Council to inform you that they have taken note of your report and the Board of Inquiry proceedings forwarded under the reference.

2. The Admiralty Board made the following observations:

a. HMS COVENTRY's role on 25 May required acceptance of risk from low air attack, and her equipment characteristics made detection of raids approaching from landward difficult. A combination of tactical decisions, understandable in the circumstances, and equipment failures led to the final raids not being engaged. The damage suffered was catastrophic and no damage control measures could have saved the ship. The ship's company behaved well.

b. Modifications to improve GWS 30 reaction time are being considered for introduction post 1985. Both material improvements in close range AAW capability and training in their effective use, especially when operating inshore, are of high priority. The lessons of this engagement are applicable to operations in the NATO area.

c. Recommendations as they apply to the Ship and Weapon Departments together with the recommendations of the Marine Technology Board are under active consideration.

d. Recommendations regarding training in damage control, ship stability and survival are supported.

unclass/NPM ~~SECRET~~

e. A review of OPS and TPS for GWS 30 may indicate the need to upgrade the complement, with possible implications on ship accommodation and on ratings structure.

f. The provision of onboard training equipment for both existing and future ships is being actively pursued by the Naval Systems Training Group.

g. Survival training will to some extent be facilitated by the use of the mobile survival classroom which is due in service shortly. A review of survival training and training aids is being undertaken.

h. Those Damage Control aspects which have a bearing on the distribution of personnel (and thus the Quarter Bills) are being reviewed.

3. Your report and the Proceedings have been taken into account in the "Lessons Learnt" studies in the Navy Department. The detailed lessons in both your report and the Proceedings are also being followed up by the staffs responsible. The Admiralty Board may wish to make further observations when all the lessons from Operation CORPORATE and from the Reports and Boards of Inquiry into other ship losses have been fully examined.

I am, Sir
Your obedient Servant

Copy to: The Flag Officer, First Flotilla

Internal: Sec/1SL
Sec/2SL
Sec/CofN
Sec/CFS
Sec/VCNS
PS/CER
AUS(NS)
AUS(NP)
DGFS(P&S)
DGNMT
DGNPS
DG Ships
DGST(N)
DNW

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~~COVERING SECRET~~

HMS NELSON
Portsmouth
Hants

00520/5.X

The Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex

9 August 1982

Sir,

REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY

1. We have the honour to present our report on the loss of HMS COVENTRY on 25th May 1982.

2. The Board convened at HMS NELSON on Monday 28 June 1982. All the facilities and support we required were willingly and efficiently provided both by NELSON and all the many authorities who provided expert advice.

3. The witnesses were, to a man, open, frank and helpful in spite of the obvious strain of reliving painful memories. This applies particularly to xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx who was in attendance for most of the Inquiry. We were all struck by the difference between those who suffered shock and injury and those who did not, particularly the way in which this affected their ability to recall details of events on the day of the loss (and before). S44 938

4. The picture which emerged from our investigations was often confusing and in some areas our version of events is open to question on points of detail. However we are confident that sound conclusions can be drawn in all critical areas. Our recommendations include some which result from the distillations of fragments of evidence and impressions gained by the Board.

5. We are conscious that we have not answered all the questions posed in our directive. That is because some subjects did not loom as large in practice as one might have expected; other apparently trivial matters assumed considerable importance.

6. We have tried to catch the mood and feeling of Operation Corporate in our narrative in order to counter balance the clarity of hindsight. The fog of war was often present. Many situations were completely new to those concerned; systems were being used in situations for which they were not designed. Unconventional and untried methods were not uncommon. Expensive failures were to be expected.

7. At 1820 on 25th May a routine air raid suddenly developed into a three minute fight for survival. It was the first direct attack on COVENTRY. The speed of events, equipment and procedural failures and bad luck overcame them. The battle-hardened BROADSWORD fared little better. It was fortunate that so many men survived.

8. We see no need for any censures or disciplinary action; on the contrary we have endorsed the Commanding Officer's recommendations for meritorious service and added some of our own.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servants

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Captain Royal Navy

N/R

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Commander Royal Navy
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Surgeon Commander Royal Navy

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REPORT OF THE BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY - CONTENTS

SECTION I — INTRODUCTION ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

SECTION II — PREPARATIONS FOR WAR ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

HMS COVENTRY, her history, her preparations for and initial involvement in Operation Corporate.

SECTION III — INSHORE AIR DEFENCE OPERATIONS ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

Inshore air defence operations - up to 251600Z MAY.

SECTION IV — THE FINAL ACTION ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

The tactical handling and weapon engagement in the final action.

SECTION V — THE DAMAGE ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

An assessment of the damage sustained and the consequences.

SECTION VI — THE ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPERATION ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

A description of the aftermath of the damage, the injuries sustained, the escape from the ship and subsequent rescue.

SECTION VII — MAJOR CONCLUSIONS ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

Synopsis of answers to the major questions

SECTION VIII — DETAILED CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ~~(SECRET)~~ unclass/NPM

ANNEX A — SUPPORTING DIAGRAMS

Appendix 1: Operations South of Stanley 6-9 May 1982
2: Patrol Line 22 May 1982
3: Patrol Lines 24-25 May 1982
4: Sea Dart Engagement 1230Z 25 May 1982
5: Sea Dart Engagement 1530Z 25 May 1982
6: Final Engagement 1800-1830Z 25 May 1982
7: Final Engagement 25 May 1982

ANNEX B — SIGNALS

Appendix 1: CTG 317.8 082321Z MAY
2: CTG 317.8 091040Z MAY
3: HMS COVENTRY 092025Z MAY
4: HMS BROADSWORD 101235Z MAY
5: HMS BROADSWORD 232218Z MAY
6: HMS BROADSWORD 220825Z MAY
7: HMS BROADSWORD 222040Z MAY
8: CTG 317.8 222234Z MAY
9: CTG 317.8 240003Z MAY
10: HMS COVENTRY 241745Z MAY
11: HMS BROADSWORD 242020Z MAY
12: HMS BROADSWORD 250538Z MAY
13: HMS BRILLIANT 122230Z MAY
14: HMS BROADSWORD 131040Z MAY
15: CINCFLEET 230453Z MAY

ANNEX C — TYPE 42/22 AAW TACTICS AND PROCEDURES

ANNEX D — WEAPON ENGINEERING (SECRET)
Appendix 1: The Final Attacks - WE Aspects - An Analysis
2: ADAWS 4 Possible Hardware, Software and Drill Improvements
3: Radar Type 909 - Possible Minor Hardware Improvements
4: EMCON Policy, Dummy Loads and Performance Testing

ANNEX E — MARINE ENGINEERING

ANNEX F — DAMAGE AND DAMAGE CONTROL
Appendix 1: Detailed Summary of Damage
2: Blast Route and Damage
3: Stability After Damage - Flooding to 2 Deck
4: Stability After Damage - Flooding to deck edge
5: Photographs of Damaged Ship:
Plate 1 - Explosion
Plate 2 - Port Side Upright
Plate 3 - Port Side Heeled
Plate 4 - Bow View Heeled
6: Photographs of PHOENIX Type 42 model:
Plate 1 - Model Flooding to 2 deck
Plate 2 - Model Deck Edge Immersed
7: Photographs of Bulkheads in 2 Deck Passageway HMS CARDIFF:
Plate 1 - Watertight bulkhead
Plate 2 - Non-watertight bulkhead
8: Damage Control - Lessons Learnt

ANNEX G — ESCAPE/SURVIVAL/RESCUE
Appendix 1: Problems Abandoning Ship
2: Liferaft Launching Difficulties

ANNEX H — FIRST AID AND CASUALTIES
Appendix 1: Deaths
2: Injuries

ANNEX J — CLOTHING AND BURNS

ANNEX K — REFERENCES CONSULTED

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Distribution:

Commander-in-Chief Fleet (Original plus 20 copies - all sections and annexes)

COVENTRY

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY

SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

1. A Board of Inquiry into the sinking of HMS COVENTRY was convened by the order of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet (1) and assembled in HMS NELSON at 0900 on 28 June. The Board was comprised of:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Royal Navy
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Royal Navy N/R
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Royal Navy
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Royal Navy
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Royal Navy

AIM OF THE BOARD

2. The aim of the Board was to investigate the circumstances leading to and attending the disablement and later sinking of HMS COVENTRY under the command of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx) Royal Navy between 23 and 26 May 1982. S38 S4N

FORM OF THE REPORT

3. The main body of the report is divided into 8 sections. The Introduction contains a synopsis of events on 25th May which is presented in a very general form and serves purely to set the scene. Detailed accounts of events leading up to, during and subsequent to the final action are contained in later sections and amplified in supporting annexes and appendices. The report thus begins with a short description on the scene of action on 25 May.

THE SCENE OF ACTION

4. On 25 May 1982, D+4, HMS COVENTRY was conducting inshore Anti-Air Warfare (AAW) operations in support of the Amphibious Operating Area (AOA) in close company with HMS BROADSWORD 10 miles north of Pebble Island, West Falkland. They were attacked by two pairs of Argentinian Skyhawk/Mirage aircraft with cannon and 1000 lb bombs. A plan of the action is at Annex A, Appendix 6.

5. It was a calm bright sunny day. The ships had worked together for prolonged periods without being directly attacked. COVENTRY had destroyed two, possibly three aircraft that afternoon with Sea Dart, one of which was acquired over Pebble Island.

6. xx S2 S2(BROADSWORD's Radar 967, with its doppler mode, tracked two pairs of hostile aircraft approaching to the southwest of Pebble Island on a heading of 080°.

7. The ships were at Action Stations, course 090° with COVENTRY leading and BROADSWORD about 3 cables fine on her starboard quarter. Instead of following the normal northerly track to the San Carlos AOA these aircraft swung low over Pebble Island and attacked in two pairs about 10 miles/1½ minutes apart.

(1) CINCFLEET's letter 00520/5.X dated 11 June 1982

8. CAP aircraft were fast approaching Station 33, 25 miles to the east but were too late to engage the first pair of aircraft. Their movement was slightly hampered by the AOA missile zone. Quick reactions by COVENTRY's fighter controller got the CAP within 3 miles of their weapon release point on the second pair of aircraft but the CAP was hauled off when Sea Dart was believed to have acquired.

9. The first pair of aircraft were only engaged by COVENTRY's 4.5 gun and both ships' close range weapons. Neither Sea Dart nor Sea Wolf was fired. The gunfire appeared to divert the attacking aircraft towards BROADSWORD who was hit by a bomb bouncing up through the flight deck and the Lynx.

10. The second pair of aircraft attacked 1½ minutes later from a direction of about 175°. They were acquired by BROADSWORD's forward Sea Wolf system in low radar tracking mode. While waiting for them to close to engagement range BROADSWORD passed close astern of COVENTRY who was the formation guide.

11. COVENTRY had in fact altered course to starboard in two steps to about 190°. She fired a Sea Dart which does not appear to have been locked on to the attacking aircraft. The 4.5 gun engaged briefly. COVENTRY was struck on the port side by cannon fire and three 1000 lb bombs. One exploded in the Conversion Machinery compartment, another in the Forward Engine Room. The third is thought to have entered the Naval Stores (3H) without exploding. A cannon shell sliced through the ship's side just above the waterline in the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room (FAMR) passing aft into the Forward Engine Room striking K air compressor. This was reported before the bombs exploded.

12. The Operations Room, HQ1 and the Machinery Control Room (MCR) were put out of action by peripheral blast and smoke logging. Their crews were shocked 33
and burnt but all escaped. The CMR, Computer Room, Forward Engine Room and 34
Junior Ratings Dining Hall were devastated, killing all 16 occupants. xxxxxx xxxxxx in the Technical Office was also killed, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

13. It quickly became apparent that massive flooding was taking place in five main compartments from 16 to 36½ stations; all internal and external communications, sensors and all but close range weapons were rendered useless. The centre of the ship at all deck levels was smoke logged, many ladders were damaged, doors and hatches were distorted, movement was difficult not least because the ship had developed an alarming list to port.

14. The ship was evacuated in an orderly fashion as it became obvious to all that capsize was imminent. The starboard liferafts were released with some difficulty and the ship abandoned. The water was cold (7°C-44.6°F), the sea state was mercifully low and the rescue by BROADSWORD and helicopters from the San Carlos area was quick and efficient.

15. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxx died in the water. 33
Many others in difficulties were assisted into very overcrowded liferafts. 34
40 people in 25-man rafts was normal. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and was lost.

16. It was difficult to get the overloaded liferafts clear of the ship. Two drifted round the bow and beneath the Sea Dart launcher and the 965 aerial. Towing these liferafts clear was difficult; one was punctured by a Sea Dart missile and subsequently sank. By about 1900 COVENTRY was lying on her port side, BROADSWORD's Gemini was paddling clear with the last of the survivors;

a Wessex V was making a final search. The last survivors reached BROADSWORD at about 2000, some 1½ hours after entering the water.

17. COVENTRY subsequently sank although this was not seen by BROADSWORD, who left the upturned hull still afloat as darkness fell. The hull has since been relocated.

SECTION II - PREPARATION FOR WAR

BUILD AND EARLY PROGRAMME

18. HMS COVENTRY, the fourth Type 42 destroyer, was laid down in 1973 and launched at the Birkenhead Yard of Cammell Laird on 21 June 1974. The ship was accepted into Service at Portsmouth in October 1978 and commissioned on 10 November 1978. Part IV trials lasted some 10 months and the ship became operational on 17 August 1979. After undergoing BOST at Portland between September and November 1979 and taking part in JMC 793 the ship returned to Portsmouth for Christmas leave and AMP.

1980 PROGRAMME

19. The early months of 1980 were spent in a series of trials, minor exercises and weapon training periods and the ship deployed to the Middle and Far East with Task Group 318.0 in mid-May 1980. After several exercises in the Indian Ocean and an AMP in Hong Kong in early August, COVENTRY visited Shanghai and then Tokyo in company with other ships of the Task Group. At the end of September, Operation ARMILLA began and COVENTRY operated for 4 weeks on patrol in the Gulf of Oman. She returned to the Group early in November for the homeward passage reaching Portsmouth on 9 December.

1981 PROGRAMME

20. Between January and April 1981 the ship underwent a DED/AMP at Portsmouth. A satisfactory standard was achieved, the major item of work having been repairs to the port Controllable Pitch Propeller (CPP) system. Command Team Training for one team was also completed and during this period some 6 officers and 139 ratings in complement billets were relieved.

21. A 2 week COST at Portland began on 5 May 1981 following post DED sea trials in late April. FOST reported that the ship arrived in a hurry and was ill-prepared for her work-up with many safety items and OPDEFs outstanding. However the performance of the warfare department in particular was reported to be most encouraging and a general enthusiasm and willingness to learn led to steady improvement being noted. Continuing defects with the 909 radars, IFF, 4.5 gun and UAA1 caused considerable frustration. On departure, COVENTRY had achieved a satisfactory standard but it was noted that much effort would be required to get the UAA1 and 909 radars fully operational. AAW remained a weak area with GSA1 not proved in AA or NGS and GWS 30 drills were still well below standard.

22. After several port visits, COVENTRY took part in a two week JMOTS sponsored exercise (ROEBUCK) which followed the pattern of a traditional JMC and then returned to Portsmouth for an AMP which began at the end of June 1981.

23. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy took command of COVENTRY on 30 June 1981. The ship remained in harbour for the combined leave and AMP period (6 weeks) and sailed for various trials and a shakedown before finally leaving for a planned 3½ months away from the base port. Exercise OCEAN VENTURE which followed provided many good training opportunities thereby preparing the ship for joining STANAVFORLANT on 1 September 1981 and launching immediately into exercise MAGIC SWORD NORTH. This exercise gave COVENTRY some valuable experience in offshore barrier operations near the coast of Norway when enemy patrol boats attacked carrier forces. Weather conditions encountered were similar to those the ship was to meet some 6 months later in the South Atlantic.

24. The STANAVFORLANT deployment continued with participation in JMC 813 at the beginning of November. This proved to be a valuable, if testing opportunity for COVENTRY from which considerable air defence training value was extracted and again South Atlantic style weather conditions were encountered. The ship returned to Portsmouth on 8 December for leave and AMP.

1982 PROGRAMME

25. The year began for COVENTRY with a short 909 radar trials period in the Portsmouth areas and 3 weeks of syllabus training in the Portland areas (Lynx DLT and PWO(U) seatime). Concurrent with an SMP from 13 February to 5 March, a period of Command Team Training was also carried out for the team which had been block drafted to the ship during the Christmas leave period. This team was favourably reported on by SMOPS DRYAD who stated that they progressed well and achieved a most satisfactory standard. The team was well motivated and produced a clear, concise picture to enable the Command to fight the ship. The air team was shown to be particularly sound as were the weapon direction team and the Fighter Controller.

26. COVENTRY sailed from UK for the last time on 17 March 1982 to take part in exercise SPRINGTRAIN 82. Again air defence was high on the agenda and the Commanding Officer has described his steadily growing confidence in his operations team which was by now soundly trained and extensively practiced. However, high seas firings at the end of March were disppointing as 2 out of the 3 Sea Dart telemetry rounds fired appeared to be rogue. There were also continuing mechanical problems and a serious plummer block defect had to be rectified in Gibraltar during late March.

27. In general therefore the ship was well prepared for war. The Commanding Officer was well satisfied with his team and, with a few exceptions mainly on the mechanical side, believed his ship to be both materially sound and operationally ready. However attacks of the sort which proved fatal for COVENTRY on 25 May, that is low level air strikes coming off nearby land, had never been a high priority in the ship's operational training. The Portland inner areas GUNEX 20L had provided limited opportunity for visual engagements with close range weapons and with GSA1 in the emergency mode but the team had never exercised 909 acquisitions under the circumstances they were to meet to the north of the Falklands. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 306
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

THE VOYAGE SOUTH

28. On 2 April 1982 after receiving the news of the invasion of the Falkland Islands, COVENTRY (in company with ANTRIM (FOF1), GLAMORGAN, SHEFFIELD, GLASGOW, ARROW, BRILLIANT, PLYMOUTH and OLMEDA) was ordered to proceed to Ascension Island. During this 9 day voyage preparations for war began in earnest. For the first 24 hours the southbound ships paired off with those who were homeward bound and topped-up with all possible items of stores and spares. COVENTRY was allocated AURORA, however, at the end of a lengthy series of transfers, there were still significant deficiencies (Sea Dart warshots, 4.5 ammunition for example) which did not become available until later.

29. During this early phase there was a full and intensive practice programme but without integral carrier support it was very difficult to exercise any realistic air defence drills. In particular, COVENTRY felt the lack of targets

for GWS 30/GSA1 system checks but with SPRINGTRAIN and earlier exercise opportunities behind them, this situation did not unduly worry the Command. At this stage, heavy emphasis was placed on surface procedures as the surface threat from the Argentinian Exocet armed vessels was seen to be dominant. NBCD exercises were conducted regularly and long term securing-for-action measures were set in train. The ship's company also began to make the necessary mental adjustments, putting aside thoughts of the planned return home for Easter leave and coming to terms with the challenge that faced them. Individuals were affected in different ways and, in a general mood of expectancy, everyone kept a close watch on the news as diplomatic manoeuvering continued. Overall, COVENTRY was a confident ship; men were quietly confident in their own ability to fight and generally could not conceive that theirs' was to be a one-way voyage.

30. On arrival at Ascension on 11 April there began a further and intensive storing period; the ship was painted in her war colours; essential maintenance was carried out and further practices and exercises took place. Although it was COVENTRY's aim to complete storing before proceeding further south, this was in the event not possible. Orders were received on 15 April to proceed with desptach in company with BRILLIANT (CTU), SHEFFIELD, GLASGOW, ARROW and APPLELEAF southwest towards the Falkland Islands to enforce the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) which was to come into force on 1 May. COVENTRY therefore left Ascension still short of several important items of spares for weapons systems and once again was concerned to ensure that these were obtained before action was joined.

31. This second stage of the passage south took COVENTRY's Task Unit in a totally silent posture to a waiting position equidistant about 1000 NM from South Georgia, the Falklands and Buenos Aires where again the ships remained silent. Exercise opportunities in this phase were particularly limited and the absence of targets and the restrictive EMCON policy dictated that full overall systems checks were impossible to achieve. Additionally, preparations were hampered by a period of particularly adverse weather in the vicinity of 40°S. Emphasis was therefore placed on those practices which could be completed within the limitations of the situation; NGS was exercised; NBCD was exhaustively pursued and final steps were taken to secure the ships for action. COVENTRY's overriding requirement at that time was to rejoin the main Task Force which was in an overt posture and thus to gain the benefit of target tracking opportunities against Sea Harriers. In particular COVENTRY wanted to be free of the EMCON silence restrictions and to exercise co-ordinated air defence drills: it was now over 3 weeks since the High Seas Firings, the last opportunity to prove the ship's main armament. Within the constraints of what was possible in the prevailing operational circumstances, most practices followed established tactical procedures and, with minor exceptions no new or special drills were developed. The Type 42/22 combination which was to be so extensively used later was not specifically exercised at this stage. Ships remained in this holding position for several days until the main Task Force arrived when final preparations began for the entry into the TEZ on 1 May. COVENTRY in particular welcomed this change of status as the opportunity to radiate on sensors and complete outstanding weapons systems checks.

32. COVENTRY was therefore now ready to go to war. There is no doubt that the ship had, during the preceding 6 months, experienced a good programme for this purpose and, with the possible exception of lingering mechanical worries, was well prepared for what lay ahead.

SECTION III - INSHORE AIR DEFENCE OPERATIONS

EARLY OPERATIONS

33. The war began in earnest for COVENTRY on 1 May when the Task Force entered the 200 mile TEZ and was strongly opposed by the Argentinian Air Force. Hostile aircraft were held at arms length by Sea Harriers and COVENTRY took a key and successful part in controlling these aircraft into position to attack Mirage and Skyhawk raids. At this stage, and in the subsequent few days, COVENTRY was stationed some 20 miles west of the carrier group which itself was about 80 miles east of Stanley.

34. During these early days many CAP engagements took place well to the west of the force, often over land on the Falklands:whilst enemy aircraft remained at high altitude, the land posed little problem to Task Force radars. However, the nature of Argentinian operations was such that many of their aircraft went low over the Islands and the resultant loss of radar contact served to heighten apprehension that air attack on the Task Force was imminent. Air launched Exocet was seen as a prime threat and COVENTRY has commented on the frequent and early use of chaff by most ships in this period.

35. Area Air Co-ordination was employed from the outset and appears to have given rise to few problems, although friendly aircraft safety remained a prime concern in COVENTRY. The absence of non-military air tracks served to clarify the air picture and the combination of IFF/SIF and identification manoeuvres seems to have met all requirements for air safety. In this phase COVENTRY had no opportunity to engage hostile targets with Sea Dart, but was content that area air defence was working well and was satisfied that the Type 42 was being employed fruitfully in a position that met the requirements of the main weapon system.

36. During the night of 2 May a surface contact was detected approximately 50 miles north of the force and COVENTRY's Lynx helicopter was despatched to investigate. In the subsequent action the contact was identified as a hostile patrol boat and was attacked and sunk by 2 Sea Skua missiles. This historic engagement marked the first firing of Sea Skua in anger and that in a highly successful operation. Later that week, on 4 May, HMS SHEFFIELD was crippled during an Exocet attack by Argentinian Super Etendard aircraft, however COVENTRY took no part in that action as she was patrolling a sector on the opposite side of the formation to SHEFFIELD.

INSHORE OPERATIONS 6-9 MAY

37. Task Force operations took a more hostile turn during early May when ships began night time bombardments of Argentinian positions in the vicinity of Stanley. COVENTRY's first turn at NGS came on 6 May when, in company with BROADSWORD who was to provide point air defence cover and ASW support, overnight bombardment took place on a gun line to the south of Cape Pembroke (Annex A Appendix 1). Navigational constraints, including the Argentinian declared minefield, and tactical considerations of air defence and vulnerability to attack from shore emplacements dictated that the ships stood off to seaward during intervals between bombardment runs. Difficulties were encountered with COVENTRY's 4.5 Mk 8 mounting during this first night inshore and this caused the action to be terminated prematurely.

38. COVENTRY was again in action with BROADSWORD for shore bombardment on the night of 8 May. Although the mechanical defect in the 4.5 mounting had been rectified on the previous day, there was a recurrence of the same problem

during this night. However, on this occasion, the defect was fully cured.
In addition to the overnight NGS operation COVENTRY and BROADSWORD had been
ordered by [redacted] to remain by day in the area to the South of Stanley
(Annex B Appendix 1) and to attack Argentinian aircraft which were 338
attempting to drop supplies to the beleaguered Stanley garrison. The aim 344
was clearly expressed by [redacted] (Annex B Appendix 2) when he instructed
COVENTRY to act as a "missile trap" and not to "drive the enemy away with
CAP" unless this became necessary. A Sea Dart line was therefore established
(Annex A Appendix 1). The likely targets, believed to be Hercules with
Skyhawk/Mirage escort, were known to be transitting from the west, crossing
West Falkland and then letting down to approach Stanley. On this occasion
COVENTRY held long range contact on a group of aircraft approaching from the 326
west [redacted] 323
[redacted] aircraft peeled off,
presumably to create a diversion but the remaining 3 were successfully indicated
to both 909s [redacted] The first missile was fired [redacted]
[redacted] but missed its target. The
second [redacted] and the third when the previous shot was reported
to have missed. These were long shots taken at the earliest opportunity for
fear the targets might detect that they had been illuminated then turn away.
[redacted] Although it
appeared that all 3 missiles missed their targets [redacted]
[redacted] 2 of the escorting Skyhawks had collided
and crashed whilst taking action to avoid an approaching Sea Dart missile. [redacted]

39. Later that day, again whilst operating on the Sea Dart line south of
Stanely, BROADSWORD indicated (via the Link), a slow moving air track flying
southwest overland in the vicinity of Port Harriet. [redacted] 326
[redacted] single Sea Dart
missile was fired which hit the target. It was seen to explode in a
spectacular manner and was subsequently identified as an Argentinian Puma
helicopter. The moment of incidence was in the vicinity of Port Pleasant,
probably over land.

40. [redacted] 326

[redacted] S26

41. COVENTRY took no further part in NGS operations off Stanley and returned to her more usual air defence role in support of the carrier group still operating well to the east. The Commanding Officer has described his lingering concern at this stage that Sea Dart was not being given the opportunity to prove itself in anything like its designed role. Whilst operating to the east, no feasible targets presented themselves. Further west, the system had often been hamstrung by land. The fertile ground seemed to him to be to the west of West Falkland, on the enemy's over-sea flight path where most factors appeared to be in Sea Dart's favour. In this vein at the end of the day (9 May), COVENTRY suggested a plan to BROADSWORD (as CTU) by signal (Annex B Appendix 3) and this was subsequently taken up by BROADSWORD in his post action SITREP (Annex B Appendix 4) but was not reflected in [redacted] immediate future plans. S38 S44

AIR DEFENCE AFTER THE LANDINGS - 21 TO 24 MAY

42. The first landings took place at San Carlos on 21 May and BROADSWORD, who was responsible for air defence in the AOA on that day, soon became aware that the Type 22 operating in such confined waters could not provide effective cover. [redacted] with enemy aircraft using contour flying techniques with great effect to achieve maximum surprise. As a result of this and a similar experience in the AOA on 23 May, BROADSWORD recommended to [redacted] (Annex B Appendix 5) that a more offensive anti-air posture should be adopted and that the Type 22/42 combination could be effectively employed by taking the fight to the enemy. This would involve intercepting attacks as they closed from the west rather than waiting for them to reach their target. Meanwhile on 22 May [redacted] detached COVENTRY from the carrier group to join up with BROADSWORD to mount an AAW patrol to the north of West Falkland (Annex B Appendix 6). This was essentially an aggressive and offensive plan which appeared to suit better the needs of both GWS 25 and GWS 30. With BROADSWORD providing close air defence and Sea Harriers in support (albeit operating near the limits of their endurance), COVENTRY looked forward to better opportunities to harass incoming enemy air raids with Sea Dart. S26 S38 S44

43. It is worthwhile briefly considering the Type 42/22 tactics at this stage before continuing with the narrative. BROADSWORD had experienced only one period of 'goalkeeping' before the transit south with HERMES: during JMC 821 she protected RFA RESOURCE for a short period (1). As a pair, COVENTRY and BROADSWORD had gained valuable experience operating together south of Stanley in the second week of May [redacted] COVENTRY as guide navigated to patrol pre-determined tracks and BROADSWORD as CTU manoeuvered to maintain station up-threat in COVENTRY's stern quadrant [redacted] as she had previously practiced with HERMES. COVENTRY was free to alter course as necessary for navigation and to open arcs as raids developed. The Commanding Officer of COVENTRY has described how this drill developed [redacted] to keep his consort informed of changes of course and speed. Initially COVENTRY always used maximum speed when under threat of air attack [redacted] But later BROADSWORD asked that slower speeds be used to enable her to maintain her S26 S26

(1) Captain F2 letter to FOF2 205/1 dated 8 Apr 82

critical close station when sudden alterations were made to counter developing raids. [redacted] COVENTRY had Tyne 1c engines. [redacted] S26 [redacted], COVENTRY then negated his previous standing instruction to select Olympus drive when Air Raid Warning Red was broadcast. By 22 May, therefore when the order to patrol northeast of Sedge Island was received, both Commanding Officers appeared satisfied with their terms of reference and had already established a good working relationship based on earlier experience and an understanding of each other's problems.

44. COVENTRY had been personally briefed by [redacted] on a secure voice circuit before detaching for this new mission. COVENTRY had freely expressed his belief that Sea Dart must be given the opportunity to fire at suitable targets on its own terms but was appraised of the problems facing amphibious S38 forces in the Falkland Sound and the need for a "missile trap" [redacted] S44 to be established to the north of West Falkland to ensure the attrition of the more northerly raids, inbound and outbound. The term "missile trap" left COVENTRY in no doubt that the aim was to carry out aggressive AAW operations with Sea Dart as the prime offensive weapon system.

45. Whilst on passage to her new northerly patrol line COVENTRY detected and acquired what was believed to be an Argentinian 707 reconnaissance aircraft (possibly the Presidential aircraft in peacetime). A very good firing solution was achieved and the order to engage with a salvo was given but missile launch did not occur due to a flash door fault. By the time this was cleared the 707 had left the feasibility envelope having possibly detected 909 illumination. This was an understandbly annoying frustration when such a prime target escaped unscathed.

46. COVENTRY and BROADSWORD patrolled a line 10 miles long running North/South about 10 miles northwest of Sedge Island (Annex A Appendix 2). Argentinian air raids continued to close from the west passing over the centre of West Falkland but all remained outside Sea Dart engagement range. Navigational difficulties in the vicinity of the north western archipelagos (Jason Islands/ Carcass Island) prevented COVENTRY from making ground to the south to close the range. COVENTRY and BROADSWORD therefore planned to bias their patrol further west on the night of 22 May (Annex B Appendix 7) but were stopped when COVENTRY was ordered to re-join the carrier group to the east as a major air launched Exocet offensive was thought possible the following day (Annex B Appendix 8). CAP control opportunities were limited at this stage as CAP stations were to the east of COVENTRY and prime targets were generally on the limit of CAP endurance.

47. COVENTRY was detached from the carrier group for the last time on 23 May having refuelled and ammunitioned. Again COVENTRY was personally briefed by [redacted] on secure speech before departing and in response to his expression S38 of concern about the choice of operating area was told to discuss his requirements with the [redacted]. [redacted] made it clear to COVENTRY S44 that although Sea Dart might be hampered by the close proximity of land there was a pressing need for a co-ordinated AAW picture to be compiled and told to the amphibious forces in San Carlos Water who were subject to repeated and heavy air attack. This verbal brief was followed up by outline signalled instructions from [redacted] to BROADSWORD (Annex B Appendix 9).

48. On meeting with BROADSWORD in the early hours of Wednesday 24 May COVENTRY discussed the question of positioning for the day's patrol, relaying S26 the brief from xxxxxxxxxxx BROADSWORD emphasised the need to tell a comprehensive air picture to shipping in the Sound xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx S38 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx S44 Selection of the patrol line was therefore dictated largely by UHF range considerations and it was decided that the area about 10-15 miles north of the north entrance to Falkland Sound would be best for the day's operations.

49. Events of 24 May were straightforward from COVENTRY's point of view. The day dawned clear, fine and cold and the enemy took advantage of the weather to press home repeated attacks on shipping and ground forces in the vicinity of San Carlos Water. It was very much a Harrier day with COVENTRY and BROADSWORD controlling CAP with significant success. No attempt was made to attack the ships on their patrol line and all potential Sea Dart targets were either downed or dispersed by a combination of CAP and fire from both shore and ships S26 in the Sound. Air picture compilation worked well xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Reports of the fearless, almost suicidal flying of the Argentinian pilots continued to surprise COVENTRY, however by the end of the day there was a general feeling that the air battle was being won. That afternoon the COVENTRY command team once again discussed the question of positioning and whether or not they would be better placed elsewhere. High on their agenda was the question of potential compromise of the ship's position as they had now spent all the daylight hours in clear weather conditions well within sight of the coast and had almost certainly been observed from the air by enemy fighters. On balance though, whilst they considered that from their position to the north of the Sound they had been S38 achieving success with CAP control, they decided once again to press for a S44 move into more open water and signalled xxxxxxxxx with further advice on Type 42/22 positioning (Annex B Appendix 10).

50. Later, after consultation with COVENTRY, BROADSWORD signalled overnight intentions (Annex B Appendix 11) and the plan for air defence of the AOA on 25 May (Annex B Appendix 12). The agreed patrol line for the following day was established slightly further to the northwest to allow COVENTRY a clearer look over the sea towards any threat developing from the west. BROADSWORD retired to fuel during the night and COVENTRY conducted an ASW patrol in the northern approaches to the Sound. The ships then made a rendezvous at first light on Thursday 25 May and began the eventful day that led to COVENTRY's final demise.

SECTION IV - THE FINAL ACTION

THE PATROL LINE

51. Dawn on Thursday 25 May was at about 1030 and the day was again cold and clear with very little cloud and light southwesterly winds. COVENTRY and BROADSWORD took up their new patrol line some 10 miles long east/west about 7½ miles north of Government Island (Annex A, Appendix 4). Stationing and manoeuvering were conducted as on the previous day. COVENTRY was guide and BROADSWORD manoeuvred to remain xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx up threat. The threat direction was assessed as being all round and air attack was considered highly probable particularly with the clear weather being very much in favour of Argentinian air operations. 326

52. COVENTRY was in good shape when she began her last day. Her fuel and ammunition state was high; there were no known serious defects with either sensors or weapon systems; the propulsion machinery was in good order and morale was assessed as high with the Ship's Company quite well rested and generally confident in their ability to deal with enemy attacks. Organisationally COVENTRY had settled down well into the routine of Defence Watch watchkeeping. The policy for closing up at Action Stations had evolved in the previous weeks from one of reacting to almost every Red warning in the early days to a more selective and less disruptive pattern based on analysis of all available information when assessing the degree of threat posed by a particular raid. COVENTRY's policy for changeover of key personnel when going from Defence to Action Stations was to minimise the number of moves involved and only to permit these in a few selected positions. For example in the case of the xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx the very much greater skill and experience of one over the other dictated that more would be lost by leaving the less effective man in the chair than would be gained by trying to maintain continuity. 338 SN4

53. Before discussing the day's events it is worth examining further the choice of patrol line for 25 May. As already described, the risk of compromise of the ship's position after the previous day's successful operations had influenced the move some 30 miles to the west. Although the positioning on 24th had allowed the use of UHF frequencies for air picture reporting it had to be acknowledged that the greater range from ships in the Sound would necessitate a switch to HF for the LAAWC net and acceptance of the known operating difficulties this would create. There was also the question of CAP control to be considered and on 25th COVENTRY found herself controlling Sea Harriers on stations that were 'down-threat' xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx Although not necessarily a serious disadvantage this was none-theless a factor to be taken into account. 526

54. Similarly, the distance of the patrol line off land was the subject of careful considerations and had to be a compromise between the needs of Sea Dart, Sea Wolf, CAP control, communications and, above all, an assessment of the enemy's most likely course of action. The indication was that the Argentinian air effort directed against San Carlos was generally routed along the north or south coastlines of West Falkland, but remaining over land. The resultant choice of a missile trap some 10 miles north of Pebble Island was therefore deemed best in the circumstances and the most likely to provide engagement opportunities for both GWS 25 and GWS 30. Indeed from COVENTRY' standpoint this new patrol line better met Sea Dart requirements than had the previous day's positioning xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx With the exception of attacks from 526

due south, which at this stage had not been observed, the move to the west seemed to solve many of the problems of Sea Dart employment about which COVENTRY as already described had made several representations to [redacted] and to [redacted] Furthermore the new position was likely to give an additional 30 miles warning [redacted] and thereby improve the air raid warning service for units in the Sound. Indeed an exchange of signals on 23/24 May between [redacted] and [redacted] indicated that the main requirements of units in the Sound was for the 42/22 air defence umbrella to be quite firmly spread in their vicinity and not operating as an interdictory force at longer range. 538 3NH 506

SEA DART ENGAGEMENT - 251230Z

55. During the forenoon the patrol was substantially without incident. HF voice communications with ships in the Sound were difficult and COVENTRY have described how they had to work a lot harder than on 24 May to tell their air picture; HMS PLYMOUTH became their main point of contact and she relayed the picture to other units involved. The first hint of action came at about 1230 when a report was received from BROADSWORD of 2 hostile air contacts being tracked over land [redacted] COVENTRY detected these targets also over land [redacted] bearing 130 (about Green 40 relative) (Annex A, Appendix 4). Contact was held intermittently as the range closed to about 45 miles. [redacted] However at this stage the ship altered course to starboard and temporarily placed the missile [redacted] in the bow blind arcs. The target (now seemingly single on 992) had meanwhile crossed North Falkland Sound and was heading towards Pebble Island. COVENTRY assessed that the 2 aircraft were flying in close formation and, [redacted] fired a salvo rather than a single shot [redacted] The ship's head was by now approaching south, still turning to starboard with the launcher bearing to port. The engagement was successful and BROADSWORD reported having seen a parachute deployed from one of the aircraft. The fate of the other was uncertain and another report (from COVENTRY's GDP) may have correlated with one of the salvo of missiles hitting a rocky islet to the north of Pebble Island.

56. The turn to starboard during the time immediately before engaging these targets is a key feature of this action. At face value the ship's original course, 090, was quite satisfactory. Both 909s had acquired and, on a relative bearing of about Green 40, the targets with their right going movement could probably have been re-engaged if necessary without an alteration of course. The logic for the turn [redacted] appears to have centred on a combination of wanting to present a fine aspect to potential attacking aircraft coupled with a feeling that arcs would remain open for longer if the ship altered course to the West. This turn made it more difficult for BROADSWORD to get up threat. 538 3NH

[redacted] 323 326

SEA DART ENGAGEMENT 251530Z

58. Later in the afternoon, at about 1530, ships in the Sound reported enemy air activity in their vicinity. BROADSWORD soon detected this raid [redacted] COVENTRY gained radar contact [redacted] With the target closing through a radar clear gap but still over land and then acquired with 909 [redacted] Although 992 contact was lost as the target approached the coast and merged with radar returns from high ground on Pebble Island, 909 remained locked on and a single Sea Dart was fired just as the target neared the northern edge of land. The moment of incidence took place over the sea to the north of Pebble Island; as 909 contact was lost almost immediately after a flash was seen on radar and Doppler tracking ceased, the engagement was judged to be successful. During this engagement COVENTRY again altered course to the south from an easterly heading for reasons similar to those used in the earlier attack. 326

59. [redacted] 323 326 This was occasioned by a report of multiple Mirage radar detected by HMS PLYMOUTH in the Sound. However this turned out to be the Blue Fox radars of an approaching Harrier CAP section and COVENTRY reverted to Defence Stations soon after. The afternoon had therefore been quite successful with COVENTRY undertaking two Sea Dart engagements and dealing effectively with problems created by the proximity of land. The significance of COVENTRY s alterations of course do not seem to have been registered in either ship.

THE FINAL ENGAGEMENT

60. [redacted] 323 326 Accordingly [redacted] forwarned COVENTRY of his intentions at about 1715 and settled down to monitor the developing situation. [redacted] Soon after, at about 1745, aircraft were detected on 965 radar bearing about 270 [redacted] By their relative movement (very slow closing rate) it was assessed that those contacts were the incoming raid tanking before commencing their attack. Contact was held on 965 radar until about 1755 when [redacted] it was assumed they had gone low for their transit across West Falkland. Air Raid Warning Red was promulgated at this stage and COVENTRY initiated a DR track on the lost 965 contact.

61. At 1800 exactly the ship went to Action Stations and was then approaching the eastern end of the planned patrol line, heading 090 at 8 knots with both Tyne engines selected. Also at this time COVENTRY had control of 2 CAP aircraft (Red Section from HMS HERMES) which were fresh on task and were joining from the east heading for their station [redacted] (Annex A, Appendix 6). Meanwhile BROADSWORD detected the incoming raid on 967 Doppler radar as 2 pairs of aircraft some 10 miles apart tracking east over West Falkland and initiated link tracks which were indicated to COVENTRY. Although these tracks did not directly correlate with the stale DR from the lost 965 326

contact, COVENTRY was satisfied with the warning provided and was fully ready for the raid. However, despite persistent searching, firm 992 contact was not established until the first pair of aircraft came clear of land flying in echelon port at about 10 miles range immediately to the north of Pebble Island. (Annex A, Appendix 7, Figure 1). 'Alarm Aircraft - Blind' was called in COVENTRY's Operations Room and both the Sea Dart and the MGD(B) repeatedly indicated the targets to the 909s but, at this stage, without success. Both radars reported clutter out to 10 miles but it is likely that inaccurate TI bearing was the problem.

62. Precise timings are difficult to establish but by this time (1820 approximately) the ship had reached the eastern extremity of its patrol line and the [redacted] in consultation with the [redacted]
had already decided to continue heading east as there was no immediate 038
navigational danger and it was apparent from Command open line that action 844
was imminent. Visual detection of the raid came when the aircraft were some 826
8 miles identified as Skyhawks flying in close formation, very low and, at the call 'Alarm Aircraft Visual', control of the 4.5" gun was given to the starboard LAS sight and the target was engaged [redacted] The [redacted] progressively stepped down the range [redacted] Some 18 rounds were fired in small groups however visual reports indicated that all fell well short of the target. By this time both 20mm and small arms fire had been brought to bear and the attacking aircraft had begun a series of evasive weaving manoeuvres. Although they had been flying directly at COVENTRY when they began their approach, when faced with a barrage of AA fire they turned to port and made for BROADSWORD eventually passing to starboard and astern of COVENTRY (Annex A, Appendix 7, Figure 3). This pair attacked BROADSWORD with 30mm cannon fire and struck the ship with one of 4 bombs dropped.

63. As this action developed, [redacted] vectored his CAP 038
section southwest towards the raid [redacted] The 844
CAP had flown no more than 5-7 miles when it became apparent that they had too 826
far to go for a successful interception without straying into BROADSWORD's missile engagement zone. They were therefore put into a port orbit some 10 miles northeast of Cape Tamar and held there pending development of further raids.

64. At about the time of the initial 992 radar detection when the attacking aircraft were some 10 miles to the south, [redacted] ordered [redacted] to alter course to port believing that he would be better placed 3
to fight the action if he made ground to seaward. However he was advised by 840
the [redacted] that a turn to starboard would serve better to keep weapon arcs open 844
and thus, before the port wheel had time to take effect [redacted] gave the order "Come hard right 140" and ordered speed to be increased to 15 knots. Thus, by the time the first pair of enemy aircraft overflew BROADSWORD, their relative bearing from COVENTRY was about Green 150 although 4.5" fire was checked when they were on COVENTRY's starboard beam (Annex A, Appendix 7, Figure 4

65. [redacted] 826

66. The final moments of the last attack have proved very difficult to reconstruct in any accurate detail. There was, no doubt, some measure of confusion. The time interval between the 2 pairs of enemy aircraft was no more than 90 seconds and although the approach of the second pair had been detected on 992 radar at some positions in the Operations Room (Annex A Appendix 7, Figure 5) in other key areas their presence was not apparent until the visual sighting was made and broadcast by which time they were only 4-5 miles at the most from COVENTRY (Annex A Appendix 7, Figure 6). When detected on 992 they were over the north coast of Pebble Island crossing fast from right to left some 8-10 miles from the ships and as they turned towards attention was still directly largely at the retreating first pair. In COVENTRY, S38
3 more or less simultaneous attempts were made to engage the approaching raid S40
and these are described separately in the following paragraphs although the exact sequence and overlap cannot be confirmed. Also at about this time [redacted] S44
gave a final order to alter course to starboard which [redacted] did using 35° of wheel. [redacted] may have been reacting to the first pair of aircraft departing to the southwest. He also thought he saw another radar contact to the northwest. [redacted] initiated a change from Tyne to Olympus drive which was never completed. This did not affect the ship's manoeuvering.

67. Soon after 992 detection of the second pair and after brief consultation with the [redacted] began to vector his CAP section towards the second raid in preparation for a [redacted] interception. They S26
had once again flown only a comparatively short distance when they were hauled S38
off, this time on the [redacted] own initiative when he heard the call 'Birds Affirm' over Command Open Line (Annex A Appendix 6). The CAP was S40
then put into another orbit to await further instructions which were in the S44
event overtaken by the failure of the impending Sea Dart and Sea Wolf engagements. At the stage they were diverted, the CAP section had only about 4-5 miles to fly to the interception point, itself on the very edge of BROADSWORD's MEZ. The [redacted] was very clear that, in the absence of a COVENTRY directive, he would have broken off the attack before penetrating the Sea Wolf danger zone.

68. Although it appears that the aircraft were painting on 992 from some 8-10 miles range the Target Indication Operators were not alerted to their presence quickly enough to enable 909 to make a timely acquisition; furthermore S26
it is probable that the Aft 909 was placed in blind arcs at a crucial moment by the ship's turn to starboard. The 4.5 gun was therefore put to follow [redacted] a target and both close range weapons and the 4.5 opened fire almost simultaneously. However the fire was checked after only 3 rounds when it was reported that the gun was in depression. [redacted]

69. Finally as the incoming raid closed to less than 3 miles, possibly closer, the Sea Dart was fired but as is now evident from BROADSWORD's GWS25 video tape, the launch angle and bearing of the missile appeared to be very wide of the approaching target. The sequence of events in this firing is obscure [redacted] In the frantic efforts to engage the enemy now at very short range it is possible that the 909 acquisition was on land or clutter and as a result nothing was achieved. Some 16 seconds later the ship was hit by 30mm cannon fire from the lead aircraft of the pair and almost immediately afterwards by 3 out of 4 bombs dropped at very low level by both aircraft (Annex A, Appendix 7, Figure 8). S26

70. The engagement from BROADSWORD's point of view was equally frustrating and confusing. She had a good air picture initially. [redacted] This frustration and a bomb hit aft did much to cloud the clear picture. S26

71. The [redacted] was not aware of COVENTRY's alteration of course to starboard although it had been signalled [redacted] (UHF). [redacted] S26 S38 OMN

72. The [redacted], in the absence of other instructions from the Operations Room, followed COVENTRY round to starboard in a wheel manoeuvre slightly inside the wake. This put BROADSWORD progressively down threat from the second pair of aircraft approaching from 175° - ie 20° to the left of the first pair (see Annex A Appendix 7).

73. [redacted] S26

SECTION V - THE DAMAGE

THE ATTACK

74. Although the precise identities and arming/weapon loads of the 2 aircraft in the second wave of the final attack have not been established, it is clear that the first aircraft fired a burst of 30mm cannon fire and then dropped at least 2 bombs. The second aircraft may not have fired any cannon shells but certainly dropped bombs, probably 2.

75. Hits were achieved by 30mm cannon shells and by 3 out of the 4 bombs that were observed falling. The size and type of bombs dropped is not known but it is probable from the severity of the explosions that they were 1000 lb weapons. Damage occasioned by each of these means is described below.

DAMAGE

30MM AIRCRAFT CANNON FIRE

76. 30mm cannon fire hit the ship's port side just above the waterline in 3J, the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room (FAMR) and in 3K slightly higher than the Forward Engine Room (FER). (Annex F, Appendix 5, Plate 2). The watchkeeper in the FAMR sighted a horizontal slot 5' x 8" wide behind the port air conditioning plant. The shell(s) then entered the FER between the ship's side and the diesel service tanks through 3J/K bulkhead. The entry was not sighted but was confirmed later when a bomb blast in the FER vented a small fireball and debris into the FAMR. The FAMR was safely evacuated with both diesel generators left running, however this compartment flooded from the sea and the FER when the ship heeled to Port as a result of further bomb damage.

77. An eye witness from the quarterdeck also saw holes on the waterline port side extending from P section right aft to the stern, he also saw the 182 Sonar winch situated aft on the quarterdeck (2R) marked and possibly dislodged from its deck mountings. Higher level cannon shell hits were also sighted in the port side of the hangar.

78. There is no evidence from eye witness accounts to suggest that either of the aircraft in the first pair which attacked BROADSWORD strafed the starboard side of COVENTRY, however a video taken by HMS BROADSWORD shows smoke emitting from a series of holes above the waterline on the starboard side prior to final capsize. This attack may be further substantiated by an account of the air lock door in the starboard side of the hangar (1N) being found off its hinges by personnel evacuating to the hangar from the aft DC base.

FIRST BOMB

79. The first bomb pierced the hull leaving a hole 6' long x 2' wide at 3G
Port (Computer Room) and is believed to have exploded after delayed-action in
the Conversion Machinery Room 4G blowing up the deck of the Computer Room and
rupturing the 4G/4H bulkhead and ship's side. The fireball and blast from 538
this explosion swept up into the Operations Room 2G from the Computer Room 544
hatch 2/3G port. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXX Although the fire in the Computer Room was observed to subside,
the generation of dense black smoke did not, thus forcing a total evacuation
of all Operations Room personnel. This bomb put all weapon, sensors and
communication systems out of action.

80. It is thought that the CMR (4G) and the Provision Room area (4H) were tapid flooded. This flood spread upwards into the Computer Room (3G) and the Naval Stores (3H).

SECOND BOMB

81. The second bomb entered the ship in the port waist at 1H penetrating the passageway at 2H, falling into the Naval Store 3H and probably finally penetrating the Provision Rooms in 4H. The bomb did not explode in the Naval Store and either remained unexploded in 4H or exited the ship outboard to sea. There is no evidence of an underwater explosion occurring in the vicinity of H section. Annex F, Appendix 5, Plate 2 shows the bomb entry marked by a vertically blackened area just forward of the NILE Stowage. The scorched screen residual smoke are partially attributable to a fire resulting from the severed hydraulic ring main that runs outboard in 2 deck passageway.

THIRD BOMB

82. The third bomb entered the ship in O1K ie through the Port Olympus intake and exploded aft in the port side of the Forward Engine Room, the blast affected the whole of K section from 5 deck to O1 deck. The blast profile viewed from HMS BROADSWORD's bridge is shown in Annex F, Appendix 5, Plate 1 photograph where the while or silver strips blown to starboard are believed to be the louvres from the starboard Olympus intake assembly. It is obvious from this view that the main force of the blast vented through the Port side Olympus intake and photograph shows a section of displaced plating between the red based whip aerial and the foremast as a result of the outward blast.

83. The Junior Rates Dining Hall 2K amidships (above the Forward Engine Room) was completely devasted by the explosion below. [redacted] were assessed as having been killed outright. 538 S44

84. Photograph shows no apparent damage to K section hull plating on the Port side above the waterline except for two minor horizontal splits between 2 and 3 deck under the Cheverton davits. From the resulting heel to port immediately after this explosion, it is assumed that there was large scale underwater damage in K section, also with the port access hatch to the Engine Room blown out into 2 deck there was an irreversible loss of Watertight Integrity. In the Type 42 destroyer 2 deck passageway is subdivided into sections by doors for blast and smoke boundary protection, but there is no watertight integrity between sections due to the non-glanded passage of pipework outboard of the door frames. Examples of this problem can be seen at (Annex F Appendix 7 Plate 2).

85. The Forward Engine Room/After Engine Room bulkhead was ruptured on the Port side close the ship's side admitting a fireball and blast. The Tyne engines remained running but de-clutched from the gearbox and propulsion was totally lost at this point. The shock-damaged control console in the MCR would have put the propulsion system (ie propellor pitch and engine throttle) in this fortuitous 'fail safe' mode. There was however the chance that the ship might have continued being driven at 21 knots ahead whilst settling deeper in the water and capsizing. Alternatively the ship could well have stopped in the water and eventually rolled over with shafts still turning but at zero propellor pitch. In circumstances other than rapid heel of the ship and flooding of the After Engine Room from the Forward Engine Room the Tyne propulsion and control could have been recovered manually providing the hardware was intact. As a direct result of the Forward Engine Room explosion, key DC and MCR personnel were forced to evacuate because of shock and smoke ingress from 2 deck passageway.

86. Within 10-15 minutes of the bombs exploding in the ship there was major flooding in G, H, J, K and L sections, the ship heeled to Port in the loll condition at about 15°. After 20-25 minutes the deck edge (heel now 25°) was immersed allowing the sea to enter 2 deck passageway from the second bomb hole in the Port waist at 1H and, at the same time, water was flooding 2 deck in K section from below via the blown hatch in the Forward Engine Room. The loll condition increased to 90° and the ship finally capsized and sank some time later.

FOURTH BOMB

87. A fourth bomb was observed to clear the ship diagonally from Port to Starboard over the Flight Deck landing astern of the ship but there are no reports of it landing nor any evidence that it exploded either on or near the ship.

DAMAGE CONTROL AND FIREFIGHTING

DAMAGE CONTROL

88. Due to the rapid development of heel caused by the flooding of 5 compartments from the Port side, no attempt to contain flooding or repair damage was made. It is also now clear that in the circumstances any attempts of this sort would have been futile and could have led to further loss of life when DC parties might have been trapped below as the ship rolled over.

FIREFIGHTING

89. In the immediate wake of the attack attempts were made to survey and then to contain outbreaks of fire, in particular those visible from the upper deck and that in the Operations Room. However these were short lived as the list rapidly developed and as with damage control attempts, were prudently abandoned when it became clear that the end was nigh.

SUMMARY

90. With 2 deck breached in 1H, 2H and 2K and with free flooding below in 5 sections of the ship it was inevitable that flood water would be transmitted along 2 deck at least between G and M sections and if 2E/G and 3M/N doors were left open the flooding would have extended throughout the ship. In this condition, a massive capsizing moment was established, the reaction being that the ship rolled on its beam ends. From this position without a watertight superstructure the ship steadily deepened and finally capsized in a state of uncontrollable loll. Eventually sinking was then purely a function of the rate of dispersal of residual buoyancy as air was forced out of the ship. It is sobering to note that this critical condition in a Type 42, which in this case was caused by massive bomb damage, could be encountered in peacetime in a serious collision and would lead to the same disastrous and inevitable end.

SECTION VI - THE ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPERATION

GENERAL

91. This concluding section of the narrative covers, in outline, events that took place after the ship had been hit and was then abandoned. Full details can be found at Annex G.

EVACUATION

92. The speed with which COVENTRY capsized and the hopelessness of the damage control and firefighting situation led the ship's company very rapidly to the conclusion that evacuation was the only prudent course of action.

93. Once damage had been sustained, power was lost to the main broadcast and it was therefore not possible to control evacuation centrally nor to give a general order to Abandon Ship. The operation was therefore quite spontaneous with groups of men being directed to make for the upper deck by their immediate superiors and in many cases doing so without specific orders.

94. There were few serious problems with escape. Many different routes were followed and a wide variety of minor difficulties was encountered (bent/broken ladders, jammed doors, buckled hatches, failed lighting, smoke, list of the ship etc). No one perished as a result of evacuation problems.

LEAVING THE SHIP

95. Again there were few serious problems with leaving. As the ship steadily rolled over to port men found increasing difficulty in maintaining their footing on the upper deck. The first men to jump did so when the list was less than 10 degrees and were able to enter the water well clear of the ship's side. As the list developed it became progressively more risky with a real danger of hitting underwater obstructions (stabiliser fins and bilge keels). As these obstructions broke surface (at about 25-30° list) men were able to slide, eventually to walk down the ship's side and then to jump from the bilge.

96. Although several minor injuries were sustained during this phase, only one man perished, [redacted] However, it must be remembered that conditions for abandoning ship were reasonable (clear calm weather, daylight). Under other circumstances the risk of injury wouldhave been much greater. 338

SURVIVAL

97. Of the 276 survivors who entered the water only 2 perished, the [redacted] who may have died from heart failure whilst swimming to a liferaft. 338

98. On average men spent about 15 minutes in the water which was cold (circa 7°C). Even those wearing survival suits suffered discomfort from cold although the duration of the rescue operation was such that this did not become a dominant factor.

99. Lifejackets worked well and only a handful of men encountered problems with flotation, mainly because they lost their personal lifejackets below decks and did not/could not avail themselves of spares before entering the water.

Survival suits however posed different problems and attracted much adverse comment from survivors. Only 35% of the 276 survivors managed to don the suit correctly; even amongst these men, many suffered ingress of water and later found difficulty with rescue when the 'Michelin Man' effect complicated the problems both of entering liferafts and then climbing scrambling nets on reaching BROADSWORD. Over half either did not attempt to put on the suit or failed to do so properly before entering the water. Again there was a variety of reasons but list of the ship, loss of the suit below decks and reluctance to remove the lifejacket all figures prominently amongst these.

100. As with other phases of the abandon ship operation, no general order to slip the liferafts could be given. Launching of the rafts was therefore undertaken on the initiative of individual officers and senior ratings when the ship was already listing some 10^{o} to port several minutes after the attack. No attempt was made to launch the port set of rafts due to the apparent danger of capsize. All 8 starboard side rafts were slipped and all inflated correctly. Considerable difficulty was experienced in actually manhandling these rafts over the side out of their stowages as the list to port increased.

101. Men entered the rafts wherever they found them and, as a result, uneven loading took place. With only 8 rafts in the water some endedup seriously overcrowded with as many as 47 men counted in one raft (88% overload) and some men still outside in the water clinging to the grab ropes. There were considerable problems when attempts were made to propel laden liferafts away from the ship's side. Rafts from the after group eventually drifted astern and clear of the ship downwind. However some of the forward rafts drifted around the bow and back close under the port side, becoming entangled with obstructions as the ship steadily rolled over. One raft was eventually punctured by the antennae of an unfired Sea Dart missile still on the launcher and eventually sank causing the occupants to take to the water again.

RESCUE

102. Rescue was affected swiftly by means of BROADSWORD's boats (whaler, Cheverton and 2 Geminis) plus about 10 helicopters from RFA FORT AUSTIN. The majority of men were deposited in BROADSWORD but some of the worst injured were flown directly ashore to a field hospital. All men were recovered from the water by about 2000Z and the search was called off at dusk when it was clear that no more survivors could be found.

103. BROADSWORD transferred the fit survivors to other ships in San Carlos later that night and sent the remainder of the wounded to the hospital ship UGANDA.

SUMMARY

104. In general the evacuation of the ship and subsequent abandonment went well. The comparatively small number of deaths and injuries is to some extent a result of the speed and efficiency with which this was carried out. There was however a considerable degree of luck: the weather was clear and calm; darkness had not fallen; the enemy did not make another attack; BROADSWORD and numerous large helicopters were close at hand. It is not difficult to envisage other circumstances in a South Atlantic winter battle when luck might not have been so much in evidence and the consequences for all concerned would have been serious.

105. The Board has noted and reported separately on a number of instances of heroism during this period following the attack. Several men totally disregarded their own safety to assist others who were in difficulty both onboard the ship and subsequently in the water. The general absence of panic and cool manner in which the ships company behaved are a credit to their underlying sound organisation and good discipline.

SECTION VII - MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

106. In this section we draw the major conclusions of our investigations in the form of answers to those broad questions which must be uppermost in most people's minds. Section VIII examines these conclusions in more detail and makes recommendations.

Q1 Was COVENTRY properly trained to cope with situation at 251820Z MAY?

A <u>No</u>. She had inadequate training for inshore AAW and massive damage situations.

Q2 Was COVENTRY uniquely undertrained?

A <u>No</u>. On the contrary in many areas she was better trained than most.

Q3 Was COVENTRY in a satisfactory material state?

A <u>Yes</u>.

Q4 Was COVENTRY being properly employed?

A <u>Yes</u>. In the extreme circumstances prevailing at the time. The very high risks were well known at all levels.

Q5 Should BROADSWORD/COVENTRY have moved when their position was thought to have been compromised?

A Possibly to the east but this would not necessarily have affected the outcome because their movement would have been seen from shore.

Q6 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

A xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx 338 OWN

Q7 Could COVENTRY have been saved?

A <u>No</u>. The massive damage to Watertight Integrity made excessive loll and final capsize inevitable.

Q8 Could any initial casualties have been avoided?

A <u>No</u> - using existing doctrine. The distribution of people within the ship can be improved.

Q9 Was evacuation properly conducted?

A Yes but in a hasty and apprehensive manner as the ship's list rapidly increased.

Q10 Was survival equipment adequate?

A a. Lifejackets - Yes.

b. Liferafts - Yes in spite of being heavily overloaded.

c. Once Only Suits - Yes when put on properly.

Q11 Did rescue operations go well?

A Yes.

Q12 Should anyone be censured?

A No.

Q13 What major issues need to be resolved?

A a. Should a Type 42 be able to defend herself against the low level short range/pop-up attack by manned aircraft/missiles?

b. If yes - to what extent should SEA DART be improved and/or other CIWS be fitted?

c. What tactical development and training effort should be devoted to close range defence?

d. Decide what types of major damage a Type 42 should be able to survive. Then, if necessary, modify the ships and their training accordingly.

SECTION VIII - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

107. For ease of reading the conclusions and recommendations have been divided into the following main sections:

a. General Considerations.

b. Operations.

c. Weapons Engineering.

d. Damage and Damage Control.

e. Escape/Survival/Rescue.

f. First Aid and Casualties.

g. Clothing and Burns.

CONCLUSIONS

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

108. Preparations for War

a. COVENTRY's programme from August 1981 to April 1982 provided (paragraphs 25-27) an ideal preparation for Operation CORPORATE. The ship had been well reported on during Command Team Training in February 1982, By the end of April 1982 the ship was well prepared for war except that:

(1) There were some outstanding ME defects.

(2) Sea Dart remained unproven.

(3) The ship had little experience of inshore AAW.

b. En route to the TEZ there were few opportunities to exercise (paragraphs 29-31) AAW procedures and weapons systems due to restrictive EMCON and lack of targets. Surface warfare, NGS and NBCD training were given priority. The ship's company adjusted themselves to the thought of war and were quietly confident of their abilities.

OPERATIONS

109. Early Operations

S38
SM4

a. COVENTRY gained useful CAP control and Area Air coordination experience with the Carrier Group xxxxxxxxxxxxx 1-5 May. Para 33-35

b. Early NGS operations were not successful owing to gun defects. These were rectified and the gun gave no further problems. Para 38

c. The first Sea Dart engagement (C130/Lear Jet) was not successful. The targets were at the limit of feasibility. — Paras 38 and

d. The successful Sea Dart engagement against the Puma helicopter whilst encouraging was not representative of the subsequent inshore problems. — Para 40

e. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx — Para 40 Annex D, Para 3d(2) S26

f. After her inshore operations South of Port Stanley COVENTRY reported that she would be best employed west of West Falkland. — Para 41

g. Offensive AAW operations required a Type 42 to the North and West of West Falkland with a Type 22 in close support. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Paras 42 and S26

h. COVENTRY's policy for closing up at Action Stations involved the minimum changes of position. The ship was fought on the watch with additional back-up where needed. — Para 52

110. 42/22 Combination

a. The 42/22 combination showed initial promise inshore. — Annex C, Para

b. However the inherent dangers were amply demonstrated when GLASGOW was hit. — Annex C, Para

c. COVENTRY's manoeuvres during the successful Sea Dart engagement at 251230Z and 251530Z appeared to be motivated by considerations of evasion. They complicated BROADSWORD's up threat manoeuvering. — Para 56

d. The significance of COVENTRY's alterations of course do not seem to have been registered in either ship. — Para 59

e. The manoeuvering methods developed by COVENTRY/BROADSWORD failed (under great stress) because:

(1) Lack of guidance on evasive manoeuvering. — Annex C, Para

(2) Lack of anticipation of COVENTRY's evasive action. — Annex C, Para 15, Para

(3) xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx in BROADSWORD was not aware of the threat axis for the second attack. — Annex C, Para 16, Para

(4) The manoeuvering method in use was not positive enough. — Annex C, Para 14 S38 S44

111. Choice of Patrol Lines 22-25 May

a. The Sedge Island patrol line put the ships in relatively clear water but out of range of the enemy aircraft flight paths. — Para 46

b. The patrol line north of the AOA (24 May) was good for CAP control and AAW coordination but did not provide any Sea Dart opportunities. — Para 49

c. The patrol line for the 25th May north of Pebble Island potentially offered better Sea Dart opportunities although less well placed for CAP control and AAW coordination. — Para 50

d. The patrol line on 25th placed the CAP down threat for incoming raids. AAWC HF was required. — Para 53

e. The distance offshore (10 miles) was a compromise between interdicting raids and self defence. GWS 30 was better placed than previously in all directions except due South. 965 warning was increased by 30 miles. — Para 54

f. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Annex C, Paras 19-20

g. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Annex C, Para 22 526

h. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Annex C, Para 23

j. xxxxxxxxxx wanted a 42/22 air defence unbrella in the vicinity of the AOA rather than one interdictory force at longer range. — Para 54 538 544

112. The Final Action

a. On 25 May COVENTRY was in a good material state, her ship's company was quite well rested and confident. — Para 52

b. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Para 60-61 523 526

c. Two good 967 Link tracks were formed on the raid as it closed over West Falkland. — Para 61

d. COVENTRY detected the first pair of aircraft on Radar 992 as they crossed the coast at 10 miles. — Para 61

e. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx very nearly completed a snap interception at very close range in confusing circumstances. He did well. — Para 67 538 544

f. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxx; xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx — Para 68 526

g. The xxxx did not provide a clear picture to xxxxxxxxxx in the latter stages of the attack. They had only 90 seconds to do so.	Para 66 538 540 544
h. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.	Para 68 526
j. Visual Gun Direction is difficult in Type 42s and targets should be kept on one side of the ship if possible.	Paras 35-36

NOTE: Detailed GWS 25 and GWS 30 conclusions are considered under Weapons Engineering at Annex D.

WEAPONS ENGINEERING

113. Lessons from Early Operations

a. The WE Department was in good material state on 25 May.	Annex D, Para 1
b. The WE Department was fully manned to the approved Scheme of Complement.	Annex D, Para 2
c. A prolonged transit in EMCON silence militates against routine servicing and testing of WE transmitting sensors.	Annex D, Appendix 4

114. Early Operations

a. No direct evidence of target hits was available until the Puma engagement.	Annex D, Para 3a(4)
b. A failure on the right lane upper flash door locking bolt prevented an engagement against the Boeing 707 recce aircraft 22 May.	Annex D, Para 3a(5) Annex D, Appendix 2 Para 5
c. The 4.5 Mk 8 experienced a rash of problems during NGS firings: all were satisfactorily resolved by mid May. During the final engagements approx 24 rounds were fired without mechanical/RPC mishap.	Annex D, Para 3b(3) Annex D, Appendix 1, Paras 2 and 3

115. The Final Action

a. Sea Dart was successful in 2 engagements on 25 May, at 1230 and 1530. During the final engagements, a missile was fired but as an unaimed shot.	Annex D, Para 3a(6) Annex D, Appendix 1, Para 4,
b. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Para 58 526
c. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Annex D, Appendix 1, Para 2

d. Neither the gun nor the Sea Dart was used effectively during the final engagement. The only rounds fired by the gun were in depression.	Annex D, Appendix 1, Paras 5 and 6
e. GWS 30 target indication problems rather than clutter appear to have hampered 909 acquisition.	Annex D, Appendix 1, Para 2; Annex C, Para .
f. Pressure of events probably caused the xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx to use incorrect drill in attempting to control xxxx turret when it went into Red limits.	Annex D, Appendix 1, Para 3 S38
g. Decisions left to the xxxxxxxxxxxxxx concerning 'Sectoring out' xxxx turret are prone to error under action conditions.	S44 Annex D, Appendix 2, Para 6

116. Equipment

a. A pair of binoculars was illegally strapped to the port LAS visual head to supplement a permanently filtered left eyepiece. The effect was to give a false angle of sight from the port LAS.	Annex D, Appendix 1, Para 5
b. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Annex D, S26 Appendix 2, Paras 1 and 2
c. Upper Flash Door locking bolts of the design available in COVENTRY are inadequate and a system freeze following failure in unacceptable.	Annex D, Appendix 2, Para 4
d. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Annex D, S26 Appendix 2, Para 7
e. A range of 4 minor hardware improvements to the Radar Type 909 operators' console seem sensible and should be incorporated.	Annex D, Appendix 5
f. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Annex D, S26 Appendix 4, Para 4
g. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Annex D, Appendix 4, S36 Para 5
h. There is no listing available showing criticality of performance testing/servicing under action conditions.	Annex D, Appendix 4, Para 5
j. 'Leak proof' dummy loads should be provided where sensor testing is essential	Annex D, Appendix 4, Para 6

DAMAGE AND DAMAGE CONTROL

117. Preparations

a. Damage Control Parties were correctly closed up before the attacks began. — Annex F Paras 1-5

b. 'Take Cover' drill was not exercised prior to being used operationally. — Annex F Paras 4-5

118. Damage

a. The precise weapon load of each attacking aircraft is not known. — Para 70 Annex F, Appendix 1

b. COVENTRY was hit by 30mm cannon fire and 3 bombs (probably 1000lb). Two exploded. — Para 71 Annex F, Appendix 1

c. 30mm cannon fire split the ship's side (5'x8") allowing the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room (3,4,5J) to flood as the ship heeled. The diesel generators were undamaged and continued to run. — Para 72 Annex F, Appendix 1

d. Two bombs, one of which exploded, flooded 3, 4G and 3, 4H. — Paras 75-77 Annex F, Appendix 1

e. One bomb flooded the Forward and After Engine Rooms. — Paras 77-81 Annex F, Appendix 1

f. The Computer Room (3H), Operations Room (2G), Senior Ratings Dining Hall (2K), HQ1/MCR 2L were devastated by blast. — Paras 75,79 & Annex F, Appendix 1

g. 2 deck passageway distributed water throughout the ship as she lolled to port and deepened. Capsize was then inevitable. — Paras 80-82, 8 Annex F, Appendix 1

119. Recovery from the Attack. HQ1 and other DC teams evacuated the HQ1/MCR/Technical Office complex soon after damage and attempted to take control of DC operations from the Aft Section Base. — Annex F Paras 8-10

120. Damage Appreciation

a. No single out-station knew the total extent of damage. — Annex F Paras 12-16

b. All DC communications had failed. — Annex F Paras 12-16

c. The Forward Section Base did not know that HQ1 had been evacuated. — Annex F Paras 12-16

121. The After DC Base

a. The huge search and rescue potential of the After DC Base was never used XXXXX to establish contact forward XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX — Annex F Paras 18-21 (538 544)

b. The normal reaction and logic of the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX were numbed by the shock of actually being hit and seeing casualties. — Annex F Paras 18-21 (538 544 540)

c. There was acute awareness of the heel and fear of being trapped between decks. — Annex F Paras 18-21

122. The Forward DC Base. The Forward DC Party was distracted from its primary task when faced with a flood of injured and shocked men evacuating the Operations Room. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX — Annex F Paras 23-28 (538 544 540)

123. Stability After Damage

a. COVENTRY heeled some 16° to Port when flooded to 2 deck in several sections of the ship. — Annex F Para 34

b. The angle of heel developed to 45° + as flooding gradually caused deck edge immersion. — Annex F Para 35

c. Final resistance to capsize was lost as heel approached 45°. — Annex F Para 35

124. Watertight Integrity of 2 Deck Passageway

a. Although 2 deck is subdivided from G to N Section only 3 bulkheads are fully watertight. — Annex F Para 36

b. Some bulkheads are fitted with watertight doors but are not watertight overall because of unsealed pipe penetrations. — Annex F Para 36

c. These bulkheads can be made watertight by A+A action but other modifications to ventilation arrangements then become necessary. — Annex F Para 36

125. Stability Documentation

The information in the NBCD Class Book is inadequate. — Annex F Para 37

ESCAPE/SURVIVAL/RESCUE

126. Organisation and Training. With the exception of 2 points (unpacking, checking and restowing each survival suit and briefing on dangerous areas for leaving the ship) all reasonable preparations had been made before entering the war zone. — Annex G Paras 2-4

127. Evacuation of the Ship

a. Due to the loss of the main broadcast, there was no general order to abandon ship. — Annex G Para 5

b. There were few serious problems with evacuation, although 28% of survivors had some degree of difficulty. (A detailed breakdown of problems is at Annex G, Appendix 1). — Annex G Para 6

128. Assembly at Abandon Ship Stations. Assembly was orderly but actual positions were dictated by mens choice of escape route, what they had done on the way there and the difficulty in maintaining a foothold on the rapidly listing deck. — Annex G Paras 7-8

129. Leaving the Ship

a. In the absence of main and upperdeck broadcasts no general order could be given to leave the ship. — Annex G Para 9

b. Men became reluctant to leave the ship as underwater obstructions broke surface when the list reached 25-30 degrees. — Annex G Para 9

c. Although a number of men sustained minor cuts and bruises whilst leaving the ship there was (with the exception of the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXX no serious injury. — Annex G 338 S4A1

130. Personal Survival. Despite the cold weather conditions personal survival did not pose many serious problems. — Annex G Para 12

131. Time in the Water

a. All survivors spent some time in the water (minimum 15 seconds, maximum 90 minutes, average 15 minutes). — Annex G Para 13

b. Cold was a problem but its effects were mainly limited to discomfort. Some men displayed symptoms of exhaustion whilst attempting to reach liferafts. — Annex G Para 13

132. Survival Suits

a. Only 35% of the survivors managed to dress correctly in the survival suit. Many subsequently suffered from the effects of ingress of water. — Annex G Para 14

b. About 53% of survivors did not attempt to dress in the survival suit due to a variety of reasons (loss of the suit below decks; deliberate decision in belief that capsize was imminent; various 'finger troubles'). — Annex G Para 15

133. Lifejackets. About 90% of survivors wore their lifejackets and few problems were encountered. — Annex G Para 17

134. Liferafts

a. No general order to launch rafts was given. — Annex G Para 18

b. No attempt was made to launch port side rafts due to increasing list of the ship. These rafts did not appear on the surface when the ship capsized. — Annex G Para 19

c. All 8 starboard side rafts were released but with increasing difficulty as the list to port increased. — Annex G Para 20

d. Liferafts in the water were heavily overladen (up to 47 men in one raft). — Annex G Para 21

e. Laden liferafts were difficult to propel from the ship's side. Some became trapped and one sank after being punctured. — Annex G Para 22

135. Rescue. Rescue was swiftly and effectively carried out by BROADSWORD's boats and 10 helicopters from RFA FORT AUSTIN.

FIRST AID AND CASUALTIES

136. Training

a. It is doubtful whether every member of the ships had adequate knowledge of BR 25 (First Aid in the Royal Navy). — Annex H Para 3

b. Although key First Aid personnel had received a good training this had not included work with real wounded. It is clear that familiarity with the problems of facing and dealing with wounded speeds up the response to the problem and promotes a calmer, more rational atmosphere. — Annex H Para 5

c. The Forward DC party appears to have been made less effective by the flood of wounded from the Operations Room area, none of whom was seriously injured. — Annex H Para 22

d. No cold water for the treatment of burns was stored in baths, basins or in any containers that could be pressed into use. — Annex H Para 22

e. Only the MO was able to set up an intravenous saline infusion. This can be lifesaving in serious burns cases and must be considered as a First Aid measure. — Annex H Para 23

f. Two men died, one indirectly, and one was quite seriously injured through adopting an incorrect posture at 'Take-Cover'. — Annex H Para 32a

CLOTHING AND BURNS

137. Protection Afforded by Clothing

a. There is no evidence to prove a difference between the protective qualities of cotton and man made fibre clothing as supplied in the RN.

b. There is good evidence to suggest that more layers of clothing improve protection against flash fire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OPERATIONS

138. The following recommendations arise from conclusions drawn from both the narrative and relevant Annexes.

139. General Considerations

a. The requirement for GWS 30 fitted ships to be able to engage low level/pop-up targets at short range should be re-examined. We believe the requirement exists.

b. The fitting of PDMS/CIWS in GWS 30 ships should be considered. The need (or otherwise) for the 42/22 combination should be established and appropriate SOP's developed. (N.B. Subsequent recommendations are subject to decisions taken on 3a above).

140. Training

a. Operational Performance Standards (OPS) for the use of GWS 30 (or PDMS/CIWS to be fitted) against low level/pop-up targets should be developed.

b. Training should be instituted at appropriate levels (career, PJT, CTT, OJT) to meet OPS in a. above. (This training may be beyond the capabilities of those now manning the system).

c. A policy for the fitting and use of onboard continuation training equipment (particularly in the quick reaction situation) during prolonged operations or exercises needs to be developed.

d. 42/22 SOP's (if developed) should be exercised at all levels.

141. Documentation

[redacted] 303 S

[redacted] 326

[redacted]

142. Systems - Expected Performance

a. The need to carry out confidence checks of Weapon Systems when opportunity targets object to being illuminated should be established. Balloon runs?

b. Realistic expectations of system performance should be made from analysis of all available information/and widely disseminated in order to dispel optimism or pessimism.

143. Systems - Preparations. No recommendations. Systems were well prepared.

144. Systems - Support. The support was excellent; those concerned should be congratulated (no doubt they have).

145. Systems - Operational Use

a. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx S26

b. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxx

c. Greater emphasis should be placed on the use of GSA1 in all its AA modes.

d. Consideration should be given to providing communications for the MGD(V) on the port side of the Type 42's GDP.

WEAPONS ENGINEERING

146. EMCON/Dummy Loads/Performance Testing

a. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx S26 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

b. Sensors which need frequent testing of transmission to maintain confidence in their performance levels should validate these against ship launched targets at every opportunity.

c. Ships should be provided with a list of minimum maintenance and servicing items for use under action conditions.

d. Where dummy loads are provisioned, every design step should be taken to minimise radiation.

147. Radar Type 909

a. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

b. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 326 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

c. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

148. Sea Dart Launching/Handling

a. Upper Flash Door locking bolt arrangements should be redesigned, trialled and fitted as a matter of urgency.

b. Procedures must be developed which allow use of the system, even in a degraded mode, if minor features of the engagement sequence fail.

149. GWS 30 System. A lethality prediction process should be included in the software.

150. GSA 1

a. Software should be provided which controls gun sectoring.

b. Ships should be reminded that binoculars are not to be lashed on to the LAS without proper authority.

DAMAGE AND DAMAGE CONTROL

151. Training

a. Take Cover drill must be introduced to ships NBCD training.

b. DC team training should impress the need for men to keep their station until directed otherwise by the leader.

152. Equipment. Typical heel angles at various levels of underwater damage should be displayed on Section Base state boards.

153. Construction

a. Type 42s currently deployed should make the non-watertight bulkheads watertight by self help or with the assistance of support vessels.

b. Similarly Type 42s in the UK should be modified and examined by their Admin Authority before re-deployment.

154. Documentation. An immediate update on Type 42 stability behaviour should be forwarded to ships and training establishments for insertion in the NBCD class book.

NOTE: A number of other minor recommendations are incorporated into 'Damage Control - Lessons Learnt' - Annex F Appendix 8.

ESCAPE/SURVIVAL/RESCUE

155. Training

a. More emphasis should be placed on Sea Survival and Raftsmanship Courses for ships as run by HMS DAEDALUS.

b. Periodic drills should be carried out to familiarise men with the technique for dressing in and wearing the survival suit.

156. Equipment Design and Provision

a. Some system of distinctive deck edge or guardrail marking should be investigated which highlights those areas where underwater obstructions make abandon ship dangerous.

b. The design of the survival suit should be re-examined to determine whether drain plugs could be re-incorporated into the feet.

c. Liferaft stowages should be modified to ensure that rafts can be released without lifting even when the ship is listing.

d. The number of liferafts carried should be increased so that there is sufficient on each side of the ship for all of the ship's company.

e. The design and equipment fit of the liferafts should be re-examined to establish whether better towing fixtures could be provided and whether the provision of some form of paddle is necessary.

FIRST AID AND CASUALTIES

157. Training

a. Individual training should be re-examined to increase the emphasis on first aid, in particular familiarity with BR 25 (First Aid in the Royal Navy).

b. Key members of both first aid and damage control teams should receive some training involving work with real wounded/injured.

c. The importance of storing cold water for treatment of burns at Action Stations should be re-emphasised in ships' NBCD training.

d. Training in intravenous saline infusion should be given to key members of first aid parties.

e. The correct position for "Taking Cover" should be taught and enforced.

CLOTHING/BURNS

158. Equipment

a. At Action Stations in addition to the basic rig of No 8's, underwear, wool socks, DMS Boots and Antiflash Gear, a HWJ should be added as an absolute minimum. As many layers as possible should be worn.

b. Each officer and rating should be issued with "Battle Clothing". This would consist of an overall with attached hood and instep straps, bulky enough to cover other clothing, made of a modern man-made fire retardant cloth such as 'Nomex'. Two suits of this clothing would be issued but only used in real war and emergencies such as fires in ships etc. Exercises would be done using standard cotton overalls.

c. All headsets should be entirely without flammable materials in exposed parts.

Martin Middlebrook

The Falklands War 1982

The Argentine Fight For The Falklands

II CONGRESO DE HISTORIA AERONÁUTICA ARGENTINA

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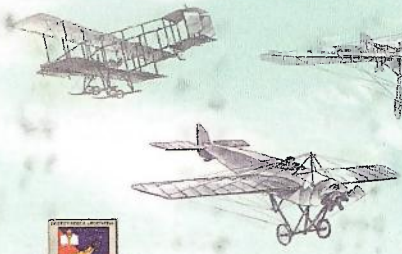
3 al 6 de septiembre de 2012



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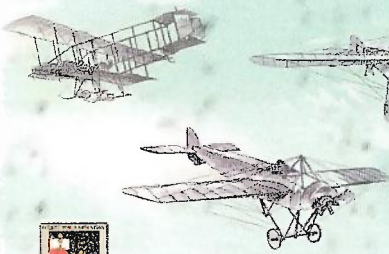

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MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK

THE ARGENTINE FIGHT FOR THE FALKLANDS

PEN & SWORD MILITARY CLASSICS

flight of the missile, and a direct hit was scored. The pilot was able to eject and he came down into the sea by parachute. Argentine aircraft and helicopters searched for his dinghy, but it was a British helicopter which found it that night and rescued the pilot. This Sea Harrier was the only British aircraft shot down in the war by the anti-aircraft units around Stanley. The other British losses were accidental – a Sea Harrier sliding off the deck of the aircraft-carrier *Invincible* in rough weather, an R A F Harrier in a landing accident at a forward airstrip at Port San Carlos and an army Gazelle helicopter shot down in error by a Sea Dart missile launched by H M S *Cardiff*; four men were killed in the helicopter.

The most interesting – and most controversial – air action of the period took place on 30 May, a day which became known in Argentina as 'the day of the *Invincible* attack'. The Super Étendard unit at Río Grande only had one remaining Exocet and was determined to use that last missile effectively, if possible by scoring a hit on one of the two British aircraft-carriers. (An Argentine account which will be included later refers to an attack on 'the aircraft-carrier', and it is possible that the air units believed the Argentine propaganda that the *Hermes* had been put out of action.) Great care was taken in preparing this last Exocet mission. Two Super Étendards would take part; the second one would use its radar to help detect the target. In an interesting extension to the mission, four air force Skyhawks were added, each armed with two 500-lb bombs; these were to follow the Exocet in and bomb an aircraft-carrier if possible. Two Hercules tankers would complete the operation, refuelling all six aircraft twice on the outward flight and meeting them again on the return – if they all survived. The operation would require a long eastward flight from Río Grande and then a turn to the north-west, a total of 700 nautical miles, in the hope of catching the British task force partly from the rear, the best way to get at the well-escorted aircraft-carriers.

The air force unit taking part in this attack was the 4th Fighter Group at San Julián. Five Skyhawks were transferred to Río Grande on 29 May, and the operation was nearly flown that afternoon, but two of the Skyhawks became unserviceable and had to be replaced from San Julián, which was over 300 miles away. The Skyhawk

pilots were far from enthusiastic to carry out this complicated mission. They would be flying from a strange base, in strange company with naval pilots, on a most unusual long-distance operation. For their part, the naval pilots would have preferred to carry out the attack on their own and they tried to have the air force involvement cancelled, but higher command was intent on creating the maximum opportunity to put a British aircraft-carrier out of action. A personal description of what happened is available, provided by the most junior pilot involved, Ensign Gerardo Isaac, one of the Skyhawk pilots: [1]

> The order arrived, and it was not a diversionary mission as had first been suggested; it was an attack mission. The situation was serious. We met for the briefing in order to plan the mission carefully. It was a point mission with the Super Étendards. Only one of them was carrying the Exocet missile; the other went as radar support. We were told that if either of the Super Étendards, or two of the Skyhawks, or one of the refuelling K C-130s had to turn back, we would all come back to the base. If we found radar pickets before reaching the target, we had to come back. If we could not find the target, we also had to come back. Everything had to be perfect.
>
> The Super Étendards took off five minutes before us. We said a Hail Mary together at the runway head and the four of us in our Skyhawks took off. We met at the rendezvous point. Seventy kilometres from the coast my gyro-horizon became unserviceable, and First Lieutenant Vásquez ordered me to return, but the controller on the ground ordered me to go ahead.
>
> I had already started back and had lost about fifty kilometres on the others, so I went alone to the refuelling. The Super Étendards refuelled at the forward Hércules, and we used the one at the back. It took us almost 200 kilometres flying over the sea, taking turns at the refuelling probes. We finally left the tankers behind, formed up and started our flight towards the blue immensity of the sea, feeling completely helpless. We

[1] From the unpublished English translation of *Dios y los Halcones*. On this occasion I have not edited the account but left it intact, so as not to be charged with altering the evidence in this controversial matter.

started the descent about 100 kilometres further on. The weather conditions were bad due to cumulo nimbus – strong wind, rain and a rough sea with clouds of foam emerging from it. We flew on at low altitude. After some time, the Super Étendards climbed up to check with their radar and then descended again. They repeated this movement several times. I kept on checking my navigation; I knew that at a certain time they would be releasing the Exocet. When my instruments indicated that point, I looked at the lead aircraft and saw the missile drop from his right wing. Its warhead was grey, and a steady flame from the propellant could be seen behind it. Once it was launched, the missile began to climb at an angle of 15 degrees but suddenly it descended with a dive of 30 degrees and seemed to be about to crash into the sea, but when it got near the water it levelled off. It flew away, leaving a neat trail of exhaust gases. Their mission had been carried out, so the Super Étendards returned to their base. We lost sight of the missile.

A minute later, I saw something in front of us, unmistakably enormous and majestic. We were approaching the stern of the *Invincible*. I called the flight leader. Until then, there had been total silence. 'The aircraft-carrier is in front of us!' We formed up for the attack. It was an astounding, impressive moment; a real struggle between feelings and science.

We began the attack, two from each side. As we were getting near, smoke began to come out from both sides of the tower, caused by the impact of the Exocet, and this became more and more dense. About thirteen kilometres out, I saw an explosion on my left; that was First Lieutenant Vásquez's plane shot down. First Lieutenant Ureta was now the leader, with First Lieutenant Castillo and me on each side. We were almost there – about two kilometres from the target – when another explosion hit First Lieutenant Castillo's plane; the shock wave shook my aircraft. First Lieutenant Castillo had been the Military Aviation Academy standard bearer when he was an aviation cadet in Córdoba and had been first in his class. I angrily pressed my gun button. When I reached the target, it was already covered in smoke. Its bulk covered everything in front of me; I pressed the bomb release and made a turn so as not to crash into the

tower, which was still concealed by the smoke. The leader also released his bomb in front of me. I kept banking, pulling negative Gs and then positive Gs and inventing several other manoeuvres, trying to avoid the missiles which I knew they were firing at me. As I departed, the aircraft-carrier had completely lost its shape; it was just a cloud of smoke in the middle of the sea.

I was worried about the frigates and the Sea Harriers so I skimmed just over the sea for about 200 kilometres. It was terribly hot inside the cockpit, so I thought of lowering the temperature with the air regulator, but surprisingly my hands would not obey my brain and remained gripping the throttle control. I called on the radio, but nobody answered. Then I saw a small dot in front and thought it was an enemy aircraft. I was helpless, having fired the last rounds from my guns, but it was First Lieutenant Ureta. He saw me, so I went near and formed up at his side. I was able to identify him by his orange-coloured exposure suit. 'Let's go to the tanker,' he said. I relaxed then because I had found someone to take me home safely. Each of us went towards one KC-130. I found it difficult to connect with the refuelling drogue. Later I saw First Lieutenant Ureta sitting in his cockpit with his face down, probably wrapped up in his thoughts. I told him to watch out in case a frigate surprised us.

We went down through the clouds and the sea appeared below us. Then we reached the coast and landed. The runway was full of people – there were tears, congratulations, embraces, questions and more tears. Two brave Argentines would remain for ever in the immensity of our sea – First Lieutenant José Daniel Vásquez and First Lieutenant Omar Jesús Castillo.

The truth of what happened is well known among members of the British task force and has been described several times in British books. The Super Étendard approach, made without the benefit of up-to-date reconnaissance, was not far enough to the east and, instead of striking at the less protected rear of the task force where the aircraft-carriers were, came in amongst the outer Type 42 destroyer screen which was approximately thirty miles to the west of the carriers. The presence of the Super Étendard and the launch of the

Exocet were detected, and every ship in the task force took precautionary measures. These would normally consist of steaming as fast as possible *away* from the incoming Exocet, at the same time firing 'chaff' rockets, whose fluttering clouds of silver foil would hopefully attract the Exocet away from each ship. The task force had also received some special helicopters whose equipment was also designed to lure an Exocet from its target. One or other of these methods was successful, because the Exocet did not hit a ship and eventually ran out of fuel and fell into the sea.

But what of the smoke-wreathed '*Invincible*' which Ensign Isaac attacked? His target was actually the much smaller Type 21 frigate *Avenger*, which was only near the Type 42 screen because it was due to go into the Falklands that night to land an artillery observation officer and his team on the coast north of Stanley. Ironically, either the Exocet warning was wrongly broadcast or *Avenger* made a mistake, because instead of steaming hard away from the Exocet she was steaming hard *towards* it and straight at the four Skyhawks which were following the missile. It was the smoke from its 4.5-inch gun, firing furiously at the incoming aircraft, and the steam from its funnel that gave the ship the impression of being covered in smoke. Many members of *Avenger*'s crew saw the Skyhawks attack, and one of the shot-down Skyhawks actually crashed into the sea nearby; a small boat collected parts of it, and of the unfortunate pilot, together with some documents. *Avenger* was not hit; the evidence on this is quite incontrovertible. HMS *Invincible* was itself at least thirty miles away! The raid was a gallant failure.

But the Argentine authorities were anxious to announce a major success. The two surviving Skyhawk pilots were hurried to their debriefing as soon as they landed; the Super Étendard pilots could not help because they had turned away when the Exocet was released. I talked to Lieutenant-Commander Philippi, a naval pilot who attended the debriefing. Ensign Isaac has described the tension, emotion and tears on landing. Philippi says that the two pilots were still in tears at the debriefing. They were shown a recognition book of British warships. There was some doubt initially, says Philippi, but both pilots eventually and independently identified the *Invincible* as the ship they had attacked. And so an immediate public announcement was made that HMS *Invincible* had been hit and put out of

action. Argentina rejoiced. That Argentine claim has never been retracted and it proves to be one of the most stubborn myths of the war. On the Argentine side there was never more than the evidence of two severely shaken and tired young pilots, who had seen two of their comrades shot down into the sea alongside them, who had flown under fire, at sea level, almost directly at a ship partially covered in smoke – not the best angle for identification purposes – and then flashed by that ship at jet speed, to be pressed on their return to identify the target. On the British side were 170 sailors on the *Avenger* who said they had been attacked by the Skyhawks and 1,100 on the *Invincible* who said they had not been attacked. The longer the Argentines stuck to their claim, the more difficult it became to correct the initial claim. And so the myth passed into their 'history' of the war. I have three post-war Argentine books in my office and the English translation of a fourth. Three of them persist with the *Invincible* story, claiming that the aircraft-carrier was taken somewhere secret to repair the damage and that this was the reason for its late return to England three months after the war ended. (*Invincible* was indeed late in returning from the war. The older *Hermes* was sent home first, and *Invincible* had to remain on station off the Falklands, during the period when Argentina refused to accept that hostilities were over, until relieved by her newly completed sister ship *Illustrious*. The Royal Navy had no other aircraft-carriers available.) When I was in Argentina five years after the war, most people I met still believed that the British had concealed the damage to *Invincible* from public knowledge, not accepting that it would have been quite impossible for the British to persuade the entire crews of the *Invincible* and the *Avenger*, and indeed of most of the other ships of the task force present on that day, to cover up a lie by the British Government.

The remaining air activities during that period are less controversial. In preparation for the imminent attack on the Stanley defences, a Vulcan bomber had been fitted with Shrike missiles which could home on to the emissions of Argentine radars. The main target was the Westinghouse ANTPS-44 'Alert' radar which could provide all-round surveillance within a radius of 200 miles from Stanley. The first of two anti-radar flights by the Vulcan took place on the night

Martin Middlebrook

THE FALKLANDS WAR 1982

The Argentinian unit, Grupo 1, with nine Hercules aircraft, was a resourceful unit. Its two tanker aircraft carried out many refuelling flights and the transport aircraft regularly ran the dangerous blockade-breaking flights to the Falklands. On 29 May, two days before Lieutenant-Commander Ward's success in shooting one of these aircraft down, a Hercules adapted to carry bombs made the first attack on the lines of supply to the British naval force off the Falklands. The Hercules found an unarmed British tanker about 800 miles north-east of the Falklands. This ship was the *British Wye*, a 16,000-ton British Petroleum ship which was one of a chain of tankers on the supply route topping up warships and supply ships sailing into the operational area. The Hercules flew low over the tanker and released eight bombs. The press reported at the time that these were rolled off the open rear ramp of the Hercules, but Second Officer P. P. Akers, on duty in the tanker's wheelhouse, says that the bombs were dropped from racks fitted to the wings of the Hercules. Four bombs fell wide and did not explode; three were nearer and exploded in the sea and one bomb hit the deck of the *British Wye* but failed to explode and bounced into the sea. Fleet Headquarters later asked if the ship could report any distinguishing features of the Argentinian aircraft. Admiral Fieldhouse is said not to have expected too much from this request, thinking that the Officer of the Watch would 'have had his hands full at the time'. But 'the most comprehensive reply imaginable' was received and Fieldhouse sent back a 'thank you' signal with the comment that 'the only thing missing was the colour of the pilot's socks'.

Sandy Woodward's naval task group spent a relatively peaceful four days after the attacks on *Coventry* and *Atlantic Conveyor* but Sunday, 30 May, brought another of the much-dreaded Exocet attacks. The Argentinians dispatched two Super Étendards and four Skyhawks. There was only one Exocet missile left of the five airborne versions held by the Argentinians at the opening of the war; the second Super Étendard was included in the raid so that it could help if the missile-carrying aircraft suffered a radar failure. The Skyhawks each carried two 500-lb bombs. The Argentinians took a great deal of care in the planning of this attack. They realized that previous Exocet

attacks had not reached the British aircraft-carriers because the attacking aircraft had not penetrated far enough east. This time they provided two refuellings *en route*, to allow the attack planes to get behind the British task force and attack from the east. If they could do this, Woodward's aircraft-carriers would be the first large ships picked up by the Exocet's radar. In the past two weeks, Argentinian radar stations at Stanley (about which more later) had been plotting the appearance and disappearance of Harriers on their screens at the beginning and end of each Harrier mission and felt able to predict from these the exact whereabouts of the British carriers. In their turn, the task-force air operations officers had been ordering the Harrier pilots to use indirect routes and to fly at low level, below the Argentinian radar cover, when leaving and approaching the carriers.

The six Argentinian planes set off in the late morning and reached the operational area without serious difficulty. The centre of the British task group was 135 nautical miles (155 statute miles) east-south-east of Stanley – relatively close to the islands. But Woodward's ships were well spread out at this time, with much activity between the task group and the islands and between the task group and the area to the west known as the TRALA (Tug, Repair and Logistic Area), where ships under repair and supply ships waiting to unload were placed. No less than twelve of Woodward's escort vessels were away from the main group on various tasks. The Argentinian aircraft came in low from the south-east, the latest information from Stanley indicating to them that they were headed for the carriers. The two Super Étendards emerged briefly over the radar horizon, located the echo of ships, aimed their one Exocet at the largest echo and turned away. The four Skyhawks followed the smoke of the speeding Exocet, hoping this would lead them to a crippled aircraft-carrier.

But the Argentinians had not gone far enough east; they were about forty miles short of the carriers. The indirect routeings of the Harriers had probably misled the Argentinians at Stanley. The Exocet was making for the recently arrived frigate *Avenger*. On this day she had twenty-four S.B.S. men on board and was on her way back in towards the Falklands to try again to land these men at various places in the Volunteer Beach area, sixteen miles north of Stanley; the operation had been abandoned the

previous night because of a fault with *Avenger*'s Lynx helicopter. At the time of the Exocet attack, *Avenger* was passing just south of the carrier group's Type 42 air-defence screen. *Exeter*, ten miles to the north, was the nearest ship in the screen.

It was *Exeter* who detected the attack first, but *Exeter*'s urgent warning was not broadcast clearly and, in *Avenger*'s Operations Room, the Exocet was reported as coming in from the north instead of the south. Most of her officers were watching a film in the Wardroom; everyone agreed that the next few minutes were more exciting than the film. *Avenger* turned to place her stern and her Sea Cat missile launcher towards the believed direction of the threat and worked up to full speed. But *Avenger*'s own warning devices then picked up the threat and it was realized that the ship was steaming hard *towards* the Exocet and that the chaff rockets which were being fired furiously were being left behind the ship and would be of little use. Captain Hugo White decided that he could not risk reversing course and presenting his ship as a broadside target, but he reduced speed to the minimum. *Avenger*'s radar then locked on to a small, fast echo approaching from dead ahead and the ship fired radar-aimed shells at what was believed to be one of two Exocets in flight. A fireball was seen at the place where *Avenger*'s shells were firing and the ship claimed one Exocet destroyed in flight. But *Ambuscade*, about ten miles nearer the aircraft-carriers, is believed to have visually sighted an Exocet passing harmlessly between herself and *Avenger*.

The Skyhawks came in next; in fact, one had already been destroyed. The fireball seen by *Avenger* was the Skyhawk formation leader's aircraft exploding. It had been hit by a Sea Dart missile fired by *Exeter* over or past *Avenger* – a good shot. The remaining three Skyhawks made straight for *Avenger*. Her earlier turn in the wrong direction left *Avenger* with the Sea Cat launcher on the aft of the ship not able to engage and she could only defend herself with her 4·5-inch gun and a few light weapons. The gun was switched to emergency control and fired a barrage of air-burst shells to explode in front of the Skyhawks, but the Argentinian pilots flew through this, although one Skyhawk may have been damaged. Master-at-Arms Bill Jarvis had earlier rushed to the bridge, thinking that this was the safe end of the ship in an Exocet attack. He describes the next,

dramatic action. He still thought that an Exocet missile was on its way.

I looked at the weather and thought it was too nice a day to die. I wondered if anyone would find anything of me if the missile struck the bridge and consoled myself with the thought that I wouldn't know a thing about it if it did.

I watched the three Skyhawks as they approached, two fine on the port bow and one fine on the starboard bow, bobbing and weaving fast and low. I focused my binoculars on the nearest one on the port bow and thought how evil it looked, heading straight for us, for me. As the aircraft reached the bow, the First Lieutenant gave the order 'Take cover' and we all hit the deck, face down, hands clasped behind the neck. The First Lieutenant landed virtually on top of me. The two port aircraft flew down the port side below the level of the bridge windows and released their bombs harmlessly into the sea. The starboard aircraft released his bomb just ahead of the ship and, as the bomb hit the sea, he flipped over to port and cartwheeled along the surface of the sea down our starboard side. Suddenly all was peace and quiet again.

Wreckage from the splashed Skyhawk was strewn on the surface, so we launched our seaboat to recover and identify it. Floating around alongside us we could clearly see pieces of flying-clothing, a wallet, some banknotes and part of the pilot's torso with a bit of leg attached. The First Lieutenant wanted the swimmer of the watch to recover this grisly relic and bring it inboard, but he refused (or failed to understand) and instead picked up a liquid oxygen tank and a holed dinghy.

The whole attack, from the first detection of the Super Étendards to the end of the Skyhawk attack, lasted no more than four minutes. *Hermes* and *Invincible*, forty miles away, had picked up the Exocet warning and carried out their usual defensive moves. There had been a humorous incident on *Invincible* – humorous only in retrospect – when the ship turned towards the Exocet threat instead of away as expected and members of her crew all rushed in the wrong direction.

The Argentinians made great publicity of this attack, which was billed as 'The *Invincible* Raid'. The two returning Skyhawk pilots claimed to have flown over the *Invincible*, burning and crippled from the Exocet attack, and to have hit it with their bombs. This claim was persisted with long after the war and even after *Invincible* had returned to England undamaged.

The Argentinians now had no more airborne Exocets left.